The Global Dance Network: Reykjavík, Iceland, Takes on New Moves

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The Global Dance Network: Reykjavík Iceland Takes on New Moves

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the Faculty of Social Sciences
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Master of Arts

By
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Advisor: Dr. Alejandro Cerón
Abstract

This research is an exploration of the contemporary dance community in Reykjavík, Iceland. The research questions guiding this thesis were founded in a desire to understand how the dance community in Reykjavík creates its own agency and meaning within the city of Reykjavík, as well as how the dance community in Reykjavík takes imported dance knowledge, localizes it and creates local meaning. With this goal of understanding the ways the community navigates the wider global dance network from its location as a northern island, I utilize concepts from the anthropology of globalization as well as dance anthropology. I specifically employ the global cultural economy and ideas of second-hand knowledge. I conducted an ethnographic study with dancers across three generations during the summer and fall of 2017 editions of the Reykjavík Dance Festival. This methodology included nine semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of online materials. I discuss how the isolation of Iceland, the movement of bodies and ideas, funding challenges, the climate of Iceland, and the roles of activism and collaboration contribute to the dance scene in Reykjavík. I suggest that dance and other art communities have their own localized agency and are not as restricted by the global cultural economy as some would suggest. Thus, I propose that Icelandic artists have their own first-hand knowledge and have found ways to navigate through this global dance network in a way that puts their city into the center of the network.

Key words: Globalization, Dance, Iceland, Network, Second-hand Knowledge
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List of Abbreviations |

- AID: Les Archives Internationales de La Danse
- APAP: Advancing Performing Arts Project
- EDN: European Dancehouse Network
- IDC: Icelandic Dance Company
- LHI: Academy of the Arts aka: Listaháskóli Íslands
- NYC: New York City
- P.A.R.T.S. Performing Arts Research and Training Studios
- RDF: Reykjavik Dance Festival
Chapter 1 Introduction

I first traveled to Iceland in the summer of 2015, for a short-term anthropology course hosted by Wellesley College. The course took us all across the West Fjords region learning about Iceland’s cultural geography. My time in Reykjavík bookended the course and introduced me to a city where art seemed to thrive. My final night in Iceland I attended a dance show at Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavík. The piece was a site-specific dance where the audience chased the dancers around through various rooms of the magnificent Harpa. As the audience and the dancers moved from space to space within Harpa, the story progressed. It ended with a sequins-filled stage, techno-music, and champagne popping. Though the program had not stated this, nor had there been any words to specifically indicate this message, I felt as if I had learned a great deal about the misconceptions of Reykjavík as a party city. I was completely blown away by the fullness of the story that had been told through the dance. This performance as well as my time studying anthropology in Iceland, piqued my desire to return to do a more in-depth study of dance in Reykjavík.

As I began to investigate the subfield of dance and anthropology I became mesmerized. I had been a dancer and choreographer for twenty years and had never before considered studying dance from an anthropological perspective. In college I had studied and performed modern and contemporary dance, and I became interested in how that genre
of dance was spread and localized around the world. The field of dance anthropology has established a rich history of understanding and interpreting movement, of examining the importance of various dances as symbolic of culture, and has developed good methodologies for studying dance. As I looked into the field of dance anthropology, I found there to be a need for studies that look into the global network of modern and contemporary styles of dance in their localized forms. There have been some studies on the spread of various types of social dances, ballroom dances, as well as an amazing cross-cultural study of four ballet companies and a study on the spread of the jive (Skinner 2012; Wulff 2012) which served as models within the field of how to go about this. Through these two studies I began to understand the theoretical approach to the import and export of dance. Furthermore, these studies explore how each localized context leaves its own mark as the dance style continues to spread through the network. Thus, they served to enhance to my methodological and theoretical approaches. As I read I found that there had been no anthropological studies into the dance community in Iceland. The Nordic dance community is very active, offering residencies to Nordic-based artists many in various countries throughout the year, yet Iceland had not been added to the canon of dance scholarship in the region. Despite this gap in the literature of the region, I was still struck by a feeling that the contemporary dance I had viewed in Iceland, where the movement style was the same as I had danced in the United States, surely meant something. I just didn’t know what it meant. I decided that by exploring dance in Iceland through the lens of community and global networks, I could get a better grasp as the ways this global dance network supports contemporary dance artists. Furthermore, I felt that doing research of the contemporary dance style in a localized setting that is often considered geographically isolated, would
lend to a greater understanding of this global dance network. In understanding this network, anthropologists can obtain a wider grasp on how knowledge flows and is shared in the contemporary world, as well as how art forms localize and change as it spreads.

Upon my return to Iceland in summer of 2017 one thing became glaringly clear: the dance community of Iceland was far more complex than I could have predicted. The confluence of the vague dance history in Iceland, Iceland’s climate and the role of funding and space results in a complex maze of obstacles through which dancers navigate every day. Perhaps most importantly, I learned how Iceland’s isolation as a nation contributes to the internationality of its contemporary dance scene. Although I became aware of these notions through interviews and observation, it was walking to the “festival bar,” Kaffibarrinn, with two Icelandic dancers after a rehearsal in snowy November that really brought this all together for me.

I did what everyone at my primary school did: I started law school and I just knew I would die. So I moved to Greece. I worked in a bar and people would ask what I do and I said I was a hobby dancer. They always asked if I wanted to dance professionally. When I moved back I began the course at LHI [Listaháskóli Íslands]. For me, for many of us it was important to change environment (Icelandic dancer).

It was this dancer’s comment about a need to have a change of scenery that would stick with me as I was beginning this writing process. Throughout my time conducting this research I wanted to understand how an isolated island in the North Atlantic could become such a global hub in dance. The research questions guiding this thesis were founded in a desire to understand how the dance community in Reykjavík creates its own agency and
meaning within the city of Reykjavík, as well as how the dance community in Reykjavík takes imported dance knowledge, localizes it and creates local meaning. With these questions in mind, this thesis explores the obstacles that the community has overcome, the obstacles the dancers are still learning how to maneuver, and the successes of the broad dance field in Reykjavík, Iceland. One of the main connections between all the dancers in my thesis is the fact that each of them studied abroad in some capacity. Through this thesis, I challenge the idea that isolated places have less agency and voice within global networks and display the ways in which the dance community in Iceland has created its own voice within the global dance network. Through a look into the global dance network, I emphasize the importance of anthropological studies that include the narratives of art communities as well as the art produced.

There are seven chapters in my thesis. Chapter Two introduces the history of settlement in Iceland in the 9th century. From there I familiarize the reader with the city of Reykjavík, where I conducted my field work. I will then introduce a brief history of dance as it occurred in Iceland. This is told from the perspective of an Icelandic dancer and researcher. Situating this study in its geographical and historical context creates a contextual map within which I place my field work and exploration of this past summer and fall.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss my theoretical approach to this research. Since this research revolved around networks across borders and the overcoming of cultural obstacles, I use Appadurai’s theories of globalization as my starting point. I use this theory with a main stress on the landscapes produced by flows in the global cultural economy. I challenge the rigidity of this global cultural economy by using Ana Vujanović’s notions of
second-hand knowledge and agency of the dancers. I then introduce some place-making concepts and dance anthropology concepts that served as framework for my research and writing. One of these concepts is “wayfinding” which helps explain the ways in which Nordic dancers navigate the global network.

Chapter Four will cover my methodological approach. I begin with my research objective, questions, and design. Here, the entire purpose of my research is laid out and justified. I next discuss my data collection which explores my reasons for being in Reykjavík for ten weeks and my return again in the late fall. This chapter also goes through my specific methods of data collection: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. After explaining how I went about gathering data I introduce my participants. I share where they are from, where they trained, and the type of work they do in the dance community of Iceland. This moves into my data analysis, most of which took place while I was still in Iceland. Finally, I end the chapter by discussing my positionality as a researcher and the ethical considerations I had while conducting the research and writing my thesis.

In Chapter Five, I share my results. These results attempt to answer my research question and are a collection of narratives representing the Icelandic dance community. My results focus on: Isolation and movement, funding, the Icelandic climate and its effect on dance, and finally agency through collaboration, activism, and place-making. These themes explain the role of this global dance network in the localized setting of Reykjavík Iceland. This chapter is told mostly through the words of the dancers who participated in my research, as well as through my field notes from days and events I attended in the city. I also share some images from my time in Iceland.
Chapter Six takes these results and goes through how they relate to my theoretical approach. This chapter challenges some of the dominant ideas in the global cultural economy and argues for an inclusion of periphery voices and advocates for the agency of art. I also share how dance expands the idea of the global cultural economy and the role anthropology has in studying art such as dance in its local contexts. Finally, I conclude my thesis in Chapter Seven, and argue that it is vital to include these stories of agency and the structures that artists reside within. Furthermore, I discuss my vision for this subfield of anthropology and how vital it is to ensure that the public has access to the archives involved in the global dance network.
Chapter 2 Background and Context

2.1 Introduction | Reykjavik, Iceland is the world’s most northerly capital. It has a population of 123,000 (iceland.is 2016), and sits right on the coast of the North Atlantic along the west side of Iceland, see Figure 1. For ten weeks and five days I lived in this city conducting my field work. In the summer the sun comes out about a third of the days and the warmest it gets is 65 degrees. A rare day of sunshine is declared “the best day of the year” by locals. No one goes to work and everyone heads for the geothermal beach or one of the city’s many pools. The midnight sun wanes as the summer moves forward, moving from setting at 23:00 to setting at 21:00 and by September you can catch the Northern lights dancing. Once it reaches November, the sun rises at 9:30 and sets by 15:45; a smaller and smaller window of light each day. The pond in the city center is already frozen and you’ll find people walking along it. In this chapter I will introduce a brief history of settlement in Iceland, discuss contemporary Reykjavik, share a brief history of dance in Iceland, and explain the Reykjavik Dance Festival’s role.
2.2 Brief History of Iceland | Iceland is an island nation of 332,000 people located in the Atlantic Ocean, near the Arctic Circle (iceland.is 2016). Historically, politically, culturally, and linguistically it is part of Norden.

The core of the region consists of the three old kingdoms Denmark, Norway and Sweden, usually described as Scandinavia, while the ‘edges’ consists of the independent republics of Finland and Iceland as well as the autonomous areas of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Taken together these countries form what is known as the Nordic countries, or—in Scandinavian languages—Norden (Vedel 2014, 3).

Iceland’s surface area is 39,808 square miles, making it Europe’s second largest island (Griffiths 1969). Over one third of the population resides in the capital city of Reykjavík. Reykjavík is a harbor located on the southwest side of the island. Art is present throughout the city—in the architecture of Harpa Concert Hall, the murals along the city streets, and
the music and literature that make their way around the world. The city celebrates the end of summer with “Culture Night.” This entails no less than twenty pop-up concerts down alleys, in bars, and free performances of ballet, theatre, and music of all genres all day at Harpa, as exemplified in Figure 2.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 2: Culture night pop-up concert and Icelandic choir at Harpa (by: Emily Creek)*

The history of settlement dates to the ninth century when Vikings from Norway began exploring beyond their own land. *Ländnámabók* or The Book of Settlement states that in 860AD a Viking (vikingr mikill) by the name of Flóki Vilgdrðarson accidently landed on Iceland at Reydnar Fjord (Pálsson and Edwards 2012). They did not last the winter and went back to Norway. Permanent society began in the year 874 AD, when the Norwegian chieftain Ingólfr Arnarson and Leif of the Sword became the first permanent settlers on the island (landnámsmenn) (Gjerset 1925). Settlers were mostly Norse, though a great number of Norsemen intermarried with Celts brought with them from Norway. The three centuries of colonization that followed are what Griffith’s calls the, “Golden Age.” This was a proud period of discovery, success at sea, and literature. Iceland, which was a Norwegian colony, came under Danish rule in 1397 with the union of the two crowns under Queen Margret of Denmark (Griffiths 1969, 25). Griffith’s named the next number of
centuries the “Dark Ages” because Iceland suffered multiple natural disasters and was cut off from the political and economic advances experienced in the rest of Scandinavia. This political, economic, social, and geographic isolation went on for hundreds of years. In the 1900s Iceland began demanding more sovereignty, making small gains with Denmark until World War II. On April 9, 1940 Nazi Germany took control of Denmark and the next day Iceland severed ties. They established a provisional governor, Sveinn Björnsson, and declared neutrality. Finally, in 1944 Iceland voted to become an independent nation and Sveinn Björnsson became the first president (Griffiths 1969). Since then, Iceland has been making a name for itself, growing in prosperity, no longer relying on Denmark for imports, and producing art, especially crime novels and music. Björk and Sigur Rós are two of the more successful stories to come from Iceland, tying their music to the natural landscape of Iceland, yet spreading to other parts of the world.

The landscape of Iceland has often been reflected in its culture, “Icelanders are a people shaped not so much by their natural environment as by their determination to overcome it” (Griffiths 1969, 5). The harshness of the landscape and the fierce water conditions faced by fisherman created a stubbornness that continues today.

When you live in a country which moves alarmingly under your feet every five years or so with an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, you face, like the saga heroes of old, a choice of two courses of action, neither of them good: Either to flee the country and all its hazards, or to stay and brave them out. For more than 1,100 years the people of Iceland have chosen to stay and brave them out. (Television presenter Magnús Magnússon, September 2001).

Much of the country is covered in volcanoes concealed by glaciers, such as Vatnajökull, Iceland’s largest glacier. Lava fields from explosions cover one eighth of the country, and the destruction of trees by early settlement resulted in a barren landscape. Yet despite this
barren landscape and difficult survival, Icelanders have a long history of a rich appreciation for literature, politics, and social ideas. Virtually all the first settlers were from “leading chiefly families” and thus Iceland had an almost perfect literacy rate and a high regard for knowledge and art from its conception (Griffiths 1969; Gjerset 1925). *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturlusson* is Iceland’s greatest collection of these Norse sagas, was written after Christian conversion (Sturlusson 1996). These stories are the basis for Iceland’s tradition in narrative storytelling about overcoming its environment, traditional culture and myth. “In Icelandic, saga means both story and history. It is literally what is said about previous events, periods, or people” (Hastrup 1998, 23). Literature, sagas and beyond, were the dominant arts form until the twentieth century, when music and painting began emerging as leisure time and luxury increased (Griffiths 1969, 23).

The 1960s were a time when modernity and prosperity were still rather fresh in Iceland. Global influences such as TV and radio, were met with a determination to maintain the pure Icelandic language, resulting in the creation of new terms for modern objects. An example of this is the word for computer, which came to the University of Iceland in 1964. There was not an Icelandic word for the computer so “the guardians of the language invented one: tölva—a fusion of tala (number) and völva (prophetess) that adds up to the wonderfully poetic “prophetess of numbers” (Zhang 2015). Another aspect of Iceland’s modernization process has been its separation from Denmark. One method of creating a culture separate from its colonial past has been through post-colonial art and specifically, developing Icelandic design (Sigfúsdóttir 2011). This is an attempt to not rely on Danish design and to create design elements that are representative of an Icelandic setting. Studies focused on Icelandic design and music have discussed how Iceland’s cultural identity,
which relies on the environment in which its placed, has often turned to art and art networks to move beyond its “remoteness” (Hastrup 1998). Hastrup defines remoteness as “a conceptual quality—rather than a geographical fact” (Hastrup 1998, 186). This remoteness revolves around the space of Iceland between nature and city; the “compression” of culture due to a colonized history; and ideas of home (Hastrup 1998, 1987). Thus, through art, music, literature, and politics, Iceland has worked to position itself on the global stage—separate from its Danish history. As Hastrup concludes, “What matters in the study of the Icelandic world is to see how Icelanders are naturally ‘central’ characters in this, their own world” (Hastrup 1998, 192).

2.3. Current Reykjavík | Today Reykjavík is a city under development. Two thirds of the population reside within the capital region. From the 1950s until the crash of 2008, the Icelandic economy was growing and more people moved from fishing towns to the city. As city life became more popular and jobs became less physical, people had free time to develop artistic pursuits (Griffiths 1969). An example of this trend in Icelandic culture was the rise of punk music in Reykjavík in the 1990s.

After the bank crash of 2008 Iceland established itself as a tourist destination. Now, ten years later, the government has begun work on many of its development projects that were halted as a result of the crash. Many of these are going to be in the service of tourists. On the one hand, this prosperity has created more funding opportunities for the arts and for students and athletes. On the other, this development has changed the experience of the
city and influenced the lifestyle of Icelanders who reside in the REK 101 postcode, the city center, as seen in the map in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Map of REK 101 and city limits (by: Google maps and Andrew Bair)

A large number of people have already moved out of the REK 101 area-code to other parts of Reykjavik and into the suburbs of the Capital Region. There is fear that as more and more Airbnbs, hotels, and tourist shops open and prices continue to rise, the heart of Reykjavik will become a ghost town. Already much of the city center is plagued by tourist shops, expensive restaurants, and hotels that continue to reach higher into the air. As Figure 4 displays, Icelanders are not shy about their stance on the development of the city and use city-supported public art to comment on it.
Icelanders have been known to preserve important elements of their culture. Some of the clearest examples are the preservation of their language, and in public demands for the government to better serve the people. Icelanders today continue to demand honesty from their government and use newspapers, TV, art, and their own life choices to fight for the integrity of their city and home. Examples of this in recent years have been both political and cultural. In 2017, the Icelandic government was overturned by the people due to scandal, a mere one year after elections. Icelanders use their voices frequently like this in politics. Iceland applied for European Union (EU) membership in 2009, following the financial crash. The goal was to destabilize their currency. The application was frozen by the government and formally withdrawn in 2013 as it was not supported by the Althing.

Figure 4: Public Art Summer 2017, The Very Famous Colorful Bárúgarnshús in Reykjavik (by: Emily Creek)
(Parliament) nor most of the Icelandic people. The importance of the Althing and the voice of the people is a unique aspect of the Iceland’s small size, “due in particular to the small size of Icelandic society, interest groups often have very close and personal ties with the government and have actively participated in the policy process” (Jonsdóttir 2013).

Activism of interest groups has also impacted cultural elements as exemplified in the 1989 decision to legalize beer after a 74-year prohibition on the beverage. “This process can therefore be understood as a sociological exercise of social control” (Ólafsdóttir 2011, 25). Beer had been banned while all other alcohol was legal. This was based in import laws and culturally this ban on beer had defined Iceland as a “spirit drinking society” with the land not being good for wine, and beer being illegal (Ólafsdóttir 2011). Much of the history of Iceland’s control on imports of alcohol and consumption can be related to its strides in becoming a nation in its own right and its history as a geographical and social place. Thus, the decision in the 1980s to bring beer back into society represents the process of globalization in Iceland: “But times were changing, cultural specificities were disappearing; increased communication and travel brought influences from abroad; and local interest groups discerned financial profits in beer sales” (Ólafsdóttir 2011, 27). Flash forward to 2018, Reykjavík alone has a number of high end craft beer joints and in 2015 Iceland boasted “One Microbrewery for Every 47 Thousand Inhabitants” making it the most per capita (Helgason 2015). This influence of tourism and travel not only meant a significant change in Icelandic culture, development, and lifestyle, but also represents both the holding on to purity of Iceland. In this instance, all of the beer is Icelandic, a way to retain culture and a display of the stubborn Icelandic drive to be the best at a given craft, especially when competing on a global scale. As this thesis will display, both this activist
approach as well as maintaining “Icelandic” in whatever ways possible, became crucial to this thesis as seen in the Icelandic dance community.

Clearly, Iceland has developed into a world tourist site. Reykjavík is known for its food, kaffi (coffee) shops, microbreweries, and art. Icelanders have frequently used their voices to impact political and cultural decisions. With the development projects of Iceland, there is great deal of work on the part of the people to keep their city and country culturally relevant. The art scene in particular uses its platform to be heard in issues of the people.

2.4 The Dance Community of Reykjavík | Dance in Reykjavík is only about twenty years into its current trajectory in the contemporary dance scene. Central to my research were the questions of how the dance community got to where it is today and how it may continue to grow. The first of these questions aligns directly with the development of Reykjavík itself and Iceland’s colonial past.

Prior to the eighteenth century Icelandic social dance called gelði connected people across farms. According to sagas, this dance was practiced some time before twelfth century (Guðmundsdóttir 2010). By the thirteenth century, opposition to dance on church property among European clergy was common, but in Iceland it was expanded to all dance. All writing about the gelði ends in the eighteenth century, as opposition grew stricter. It is assumed that the wealthy class stopped dancing first, followed by the working class farmers. Dance continued on differently in the rest of Norden, for example:

In the traditional way, people in the Nordic countries danced at weddings, and wedding dances in the Faroes seem to have taken on a religious character in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when for example, people danced to hymns, with the vicar joining in (Guðmundsdóttir 2010, 29).
There may have been geographical reasons for this as well. In the Faroe Islands at least 15 people are needed for a vikivaki, which is a ring dance common throughout Norden that is danced to a long story and music. In Iceland, the farms were further apart than in urban area of Norden, and winters in Iceland are harsher than the Faroe Islands. Guðmundsdóttir writes, “if dancing survived at all in Iceland, it stagnated, and the new varieties of dance that were current in other countries either did not make their way to Iceland or else did not succeed in becoming established there until the nineteenth century” (Guðmundsdóttir 2010, 31). While humans may not have been dancing, Guðmundsdóttir writes that the same time that dance was repressed, elves and hidden people are dancing in the sagas. In one particular story a shepherd joins the hidden people in a dance, because he was not permitted to dance with his own kind. In these stories and legends dance continued (Guðmundsdóttir 2010). Unfortunately, all of the writing of sagas and dance in Iceland were written after the church was well established, so there may have been older styles and social dances that have been lost to time.

The first Icelandic dancer of the twentieth century was Stefánía Guðmundsdóttir, an escort of the Danish king, who traveled to Copenhagen from 1914-1918 to learn ballet and tango (Gunnarsdóttir 2012, 17). She was taught plastikk, a forerunner to modern dance, by a Danish ballet dancer in the court before travelling to Denmark to study tango and ballet, among other styles. In 1922, the first purely dance performance took place at lónó by Stefánía’s student, Ásta Norðmann. In 1929, Ásta opened Iceland’s first dance school (Gunnarsdóttir 2012, 18). As students grew older they began to go abroad to study dance more in depth, and in 1947 when a group of these students returned home the National
Association of Icelandic Dancers was founded. The founding members were Ásta (first chairwoman) Sigrður Ármann, Sif Thórz, Rigmor Hansen and Ellý Thorláksson (Gunnarsdóttir 2012, 18). By 1952 the Ballet School of the National Theatre was created and in 1973 the Iceland Dance Company (IDC) was established. The IDC began as a ballet theatre until 1980 when Nanna Gunnarsdóttir curated the first full length modern piece and took over as director (Gunnarsdóttir 2012, 19). Since the 1980s the IDC has taken new directors, further developing itself in modern dance.

Dance over the past twenty or so years has grown rapidly. First, in 2002 the Reykjavík Dance Festival (RDF) was founded, “its aim was to become a platform for independent choreographers in Iceland, which did not have an official platform before” (Gunnarsdóttir 2012, 16). The RDF allowed dancers who had all been trained in various countries under various methods to pool financial resources, networks, and audiences and create the works that were important to them. In 2005, the group of dancers who founded the RDF helped to create the Contemporary Dance Department at University of the Arts (LHI). This allowed students to remain in or come to, Iceland to obtain their Bachelors of Arts (BA) in dance. It also provided a place for Icelandic dancers, choreographers, and theorists to find more stable work. In 2010, the Reykjavík Dance Atelier was created as a home for the Dancer Association. The Dance Atelier is a space for creation of work, rehearsal of work, and teaching (Gunnarsdóttir 2012).

2.4a Reykjavík Dance Festival | The Reykjavík Dance Festival is thus central to the community of dance in Iceland. The festival began in 2002, and since 2014 it takes place three times a year. There is a residency festival, the “main event,” and a kids dance festival that takes place in the spring. The summer 2017 festival was two weeks of
residencies and workshops with a few performances. The November edition saw the result of many of those, and welcomed artists from Norway, England, Ireland, and Israel. This festival has been integral in getting Icelandic dancers and other artists produced and on the international stage.

2.4b Everybody’s Spectacular, November 2017 | The November edition of the RDF was a joint production with Lókal, Reykjavik’s performance art festival. They combined for the first time in 2015 under the name Everybody’s Spectacular. The festival theme for this year’s edition was “smallest acts of defiance.” Thus, the acts were centered on ideas of challenging and discussing ideas that are not often discussed explicitly in culture. The programs for the festival describe it as such:

In the thickening dark of November, Everybody’s Spectacular finds hope in the idea that even the smallest acts of defiance can make a major impact on the world around us. Whether it’s standing up for a person’s rights, speaking out against sexual harassment and abuse, or kneeling down in protest on a football field, there lies in every defiant act a hopeful refusal to accept the status quo (Everybody’s Spectacular 2017).

The festival was unafraid to speak on these themes, boldly and out loud. The performances challenged the strict definition of dance, dug deep into the possibilities of performance, and created spaces where conversations and voices often overlooked in Icelandic culture could be heard. This combined effort of performance art and dance also displays how various art forms in a small art community have come together to support each other and achieve more cultural leverage.
Chapter 3 Theoretical Approach |

3.1 Theoretical Approach | I chose to situate my research in Arjun Appadurai’s globalization theory of disjuncture in the global cultural economy surrounding movement of people and ideas. This research revolved around networks across borders, community growth, cultural obstacles, and was situated in a specific time and place. The framework situated my research in this ever-changing setting while giving voice to the participants rather than me as the researcher. I expand this theoretical foundation with concepts from the canon of dance and anthropology including semantics and embodiment, feminist frameworks, and the concept of the Global Dance Network. Vujanović’s theory of Second-Hand Knowledge further complicates the globalization theory of disjuncture.

3.2 Dance and Anthropology | The roots of dance and anthropology lie in the study of meaning behind the movements in dance. In particular, the interest in the study of dance from an anthropological lens has roots in Marcel Mauss’s “Techniques of the Body.” In this theory he asserts that because the body is what makes the human complete and serves as the human’s instrument, one must study body movements and learned body practices within specific cultural settings (Mauss 1934). There is also a relationship between dance anthropology and somatics. Dance scholar Katja Kolcio writes that,
Somatics was defined by Thomas Hanna in the 1970s as a human being perceived from the literary first-person... More recently dance scholars have explored the larger social implications of somatic perspective... The liberatory potential of dance and the necessity of embodied practice to the realization of both personal and social change. (Kolcio 2005, 104-105).

Through somatics, scholars have addressed body-centric concepts and questions regarding how bodies perform and move through particular spaces and times. Dance anthropologists have taken this body-centric approach and opened it up through a wider cultural lens. There are three traditional approaches to the anthropological study of dance: meaning, function, and cultural context; movement and form, which relates most to somatics; and a combination of the two (Wulff 2015, 668). There is also a more recent trend in the subfield that combines the meaning and function of dance with ideas of gender and sexuality.

I am using the first approach to the anthropology of dance: its meaning, function, and cultural context. However, I also found myself engaging in the fourth approach, regarding sexuality and gender. I was studying dance as action and dance as community, and in the end, I found myself studying dance as breaking dichotomous structures through these networks. These traditional approaches to dance anthropology stem from the study of meaning in movement in various genres of dance, often social or ceremonial dances. More recently dance anthropologists have been looking at the spread of social dances and staged performance dance styles (Wulff 2012; Vedel 2014). Although there is one edited volume of dance in Norden using various theoretical approaches, there have been no anthropological studies of the modern dance community in Iceland (Vedel 2014). My research takes concepts and methods of these various studies of social and staged dance, but eventually departs from all of them due to Iceland’s own localization of ideas regarding
dance and performance. Two of the most influential studies to my work were Skinner’s transnational study of the import and export of the Jive and Helena Wulff’s transnational study of three ballet companies across Europe (Skinner 2012; Wulff 2012). Dance theorists in Norden have also created a culturally-specific way of studying the cultural context of dance and function of the dance community within the region. I thus chose to utilize these various methods and ideas within transnational anthropology as they relate specifically to dance. The three dance and anthropology concepts most important to my research are: the import and export of knowledge (dance), wayfinding, and place-making.

3.3 Conceptual framework | There are three main concepts that tie the transnationalism of Norden specifically to dance: society and dance, the wayfinding of dancers, and place-making. Vedel and Hoppu use Steven Vertovec’s definition of transnationalism here: “multiple ties and interactions, long-distance networks, linking people or institutions across borders of nation states” (Vedel 2014, 12). These transnational flows are seen through the dance’s role in Nordic society, specifically in my case Icelandic society; and the idea of way-finding through these systems.

3.3a Society and Dance | Dance has the ability to shape society and spaces. The role of dance is not only to display the cultural ideals of a place, but it can also be used to open up critiques of society and host conversations not being had elsewhere. In this sense new dance styles and ideas get localized in specific ways depending on the culture of the new place and the way the local dancers choose use the medium (Vedel and Hoppu 2014). Vedel and Hoppu call this the ‘glocal’ or the localized context of global ideas in dance. An example of this is the spread of jazz, an African-American/Caribbean style of dance
spreading to Norden in the 1960s. In Norden, this culturally specific style of dance and identity became a style used for “please, fitness, therapy, education, and aesthetic expression” (Hammergren 2014). The movement of this information from one country or context to another is what Appadurai refers to when he discusses flows of knowledge in his various landscapes (ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescape, and ideoscape).

Ethnoscapes are defined as “multi directional movements” between migratory people (Appadurai 1996). There is a sense of constant movement which prevents the formation of their own stable imagined community. In Appadurai’s context this often refers to refugee populations and other migrants of ethnic groups. However, this can apply to the realm of artists and dancers as well. Dancers coming from peripheries such as Iceland move to centers such as Brussels and back home again. They also constantly move across boundaries on tours, through residencies, and as guest teachers. Expanding the definition of an ethnoscape to professions such as dancer broadens this theory and allows for investigation into the ways various places value art. Art that is valued, learned, produced, and shared is often reflective of history or present ideas and circumstances of a place. Ignoring professions such as dancers and other artists, who are deeply involved with crossing borders as part of their work, limits the global cultural economy.

Mediascapes are the canon of specific field or philosophical/religious idea. In this case dance is the mediascape. As discussed, Icelandic dancers learned their dance history through books and the teaching of ‘disciples’ of the leading names in modern dance. This ‘scape acknowledges the agency of the localization process. In Icelandic dance we see this in the way that centric philosophies are used by dancers to create new works. An example
of this is IDC doing a piece called *Da Da Dans* for the centennial of the fringe art philosophy. The dance was created after months of studying the Dada movement, a movement that never came to Iceland itself. The Icelandic choreographers and dancers had paintings, manifestos, books, and videos in which to learn about the movement and then made their own interpretations and embodied the dance movement.

Technoscapes refers to the spread of technology around the world. Within the context of dance this includes music, lighting, costume, and set. At the November *Everybody’s Spectacular* a theatre group from London was performing and they needed an apparatus to perform some aerial tricks. The head of the group was frustrated and nervous with the team setting the stage and wanted to be in charge of the situation. Her attitude hinted at a disbelief that the Icelandic team had the knowledge to set her stage. In the end, everything worked out just fine. But the underlying fact remained that there was an assumption that Iceland’s isolation meant that Icelandic stage hands could not or had not properly engaged with globalized knowledge of this particular type of set-building, and that they would be unable to produce and perform with the same competence as those performers from London.

Financescapes are the flows of funds across borders. In the world of dance this occurs through grants that either require the dancer to work abroad or allow them to work in Iceland, residencies again either in Iceland or abroad, and temporary or stable jobs abroad. The funding either allows the dancer to create or to travel, or prevents them from doing so.

It’s so crazy that we can’t really move as dancers, because as dancers, movement is our thing. You can’t move because we don’t have the space to
move or the funding to move. You can’t move! Unless you move on the street, that’s not everyone’s dream or interest (Stienunn).

The Reykjavík Dance Festival serves as a method of resistance against the total reliance on already established funding networks, by creating their own source of residency and funding.

Ideoscapes encompass the movement of thoughts and philosophies across borders.

“Through studying different dance techniques, and their codified movements, the bodies of professional contemporary dance artists in Iceland are informed by past dominant styles and an ideology of how a dance body should be trained, in order to be qualified as a dancer” (Gunnarsdóttir 2012, 28-9).

One dancer, Brogan, highlighted this flow in a simple and concise manner as she discussed the growth of professional dance education in Iceland.

So a lot of people go away and study abroad and come back and bring a lot of influences, which is important... it’s a very small course (the BA at LHI).

I was just teaching at the university for a class and we made a project together and I think there were like 10 or 11. Each year group is just very different. So it seems like things shift depending on whose doing something.

Thus, the variation of contemporary dance that is most in trend depends on who is teaching at LHI and where they trained. Although the current status of this dance program fluctuates greatly upon who is teaching, as time goes on there is the start of an Icelandic consistency which serves as resistance to the inevitability of this flow. First, there is an embracing of the idea that the flow is not negative to the Icelandic community. “I think it has been very important in terms of getting ideas about training and even different aesthetical ideas and think it is good to not have just one view” (Ólöf). Then there is the
fact that more and more of the teachers at LHI and in other dance schools around Iceland are Icelandic artists that have completed the BA.

As Appadurai states, “the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part from their own sense of what these landscapes offer” (Appadurai 1996, 33). For Appadurai, these flows are disconnected and are always in a push-pull. The connections made at a residency may allow for the movement of a dancer to Iceland, but the lack of funding may prevent it. Furthermore, Appadurai situates these flows on a scale—where nation states or cultures at the center send out these flows to areas on the periphery. Dancers thus become the “building blocks of imagined worlds” an extension of Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined community (Appadurai 1996, 33). These imagined worlds stem from the dominant ideas provided by the central or dominant power, and the dancers simply participate in this world. As I will display, the dance community and what it stands for also becomes its own imagined world. This navigation of the landscapes by individuals is what Vedel calls, “wayfinding” and this idea of imagined worlds, is related to place-making within this transnational framework. I argue that this process of “wayfinding” allows dance communities to become their own ‘center.’

3.3b “Wayfinding” | Ideas and movement pallets are not the only things to move across borders. When dance first came to Iceland, it came through other people. Isadora Duncan brought her modern dance to Iceland and was the first and only dancer within the canon of modern dance to do so. Thus, dancers struggle with the idea of having second-hand knowledge. A few things are challenged in this idea. The first is that dancers on the peripheries have to learn the language of the “master” in order to succeed (Vujanović 2009,
Second is the idea that knowledge coming from the center where the dance styles and theories were created are the only knowledge’s that matter. Third, stemming from the first concept is the fact that peripheries have their own knowledge, their own influence on the canon, their own context. Dancers have always moved across borders to train and to find work. Today these movements include residencies and festivals like the RDF. Through these reciprocal partnerships ideas and money move in and out of places (Vedel 2014). These residencies facilitate the movement of “information and funding, performances, artistic inspiration, dance knowledge, and gestures expanding well beyond the Nordic region” (Vedel 2014, 57). Within Iceland, residencies and training abroad are even more necessary than in other areas due to its historical and geographical remoteness. Thus, a dancer’s ability to travel across borders provides networks of idea sharing, dance methodology growth, and funding opportunities that would not exist if they remained in Iceland. With this process in mind, I will refer to the mobility of Icelandic dancers (and dancers coming to Iceland) as wayfinding. As these artists come in and out of their home, and the movement, training methods, or philosophies get localized, dancers can create a new community. These communities are created when “dancing bodies construct a new and powerful lived world, homeland and body-land, all in a world on the move” (Skinner 2012, 35). This body-land he refers to ties into the concept of the creating ‘imagined world’ or place-making.

3.3c Anthropology and Place | The ability to create a home and a community amidst this process of wayfinding is essential to dancers within the Nordic region, which has an imagined geography that shifts and changes depending on who is defining it. (Vedel 2014, 1). This is due to the fact that depending on whether the region is being defined
geographically, culturally, or linguistically different countries may or may not be included. For this thesis I am referring to the region as Vedel does, geographically. Thus I include Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, The Faroe Islands, and Åland.

Creating a dance community requires place-making. Dancers require spaces to work. Dancers also create space for conversation. “Spaces also serve as tools of thought, action, and power. Thus dancers contribute to the production of space not only by their physical participation but also by their ways of thinking and behaving” (Fiskvik 2014, 183). The current realities of a space are reflective of the lived experiences and conversations of those occupying the space (Lefebvre 1991, 403). So a dance space or a dance community is then tied to all of these things as it simultaneously provides a place for dance to physically occur. The spatial practices, representations of space through movement and dance, and affordances of the space itself are all a part of this place-making process (Lefebvre 1991).

Situating this research in the dance anthropology approach of: dance and its meaning, function, and cultural context while also paying attention to sexuality and gender thus directed the concepts important to this research. I view the dance community: its people and its actions as reflective of and counter to Icelandic society. I focused on the wayfinding paths and ‘glocal’ knowledge sharing of the dancers, and I look at both of these concepts through the lens of the Dancer Association and RDF in Reykjavík itself as the home and confluence these concepts.

**3.3d Feminist Framework** Since this research was driven by the RDF which took an activist-approach, I was engaged with feminist theory. In particular, for the FEMINIST CHOIR, Gerald had us read three manifestos central to feminist theory. The *Cyborg Manifesto*, *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*, and the *EcoSex Manifesto*. The ideas and concepts from
the manifestos were used directly in the context of the songs that were written by the choir, but they also framed the way I thought about the work that was being done in and for the dance community in Iceland. The concepts that I pulled from these feminist manifestos were: roots of female oppression, irreverence, post-gender world, dissolving the West and its discourses, the money-system, and embracing “revolutionary” acts of art and pleasure.

Solanas’s idea surrounding the roots of female oppression states that that “no aspect of society is relevant to women” and “females crave absorbing, emotionally satisfying, meaningful activity” (Solanas 1967). This frames her entire manifesto, that men feared the reproductive power of women and thus have created a world that is difficult or impossible for women to maneuver in a productive manner. Since I worked with a female sample of the Icelandic dance population—and I found that a lot of the work and discussions were questions about how dance can expand, what comes next, and how to maneuver a system and a geography that is often contrary to their needs as artists and dancers. People mentioned a hierarchy of art, and that dance was low on that hierarchy because it is heavily a women’s field. This concept of a world created for men was a driving force behind many of the works of dance and discussions held throughout the course of my research.

When Donna Haraway calls for an irreverence, she is calling for a disruption of the status quo. She is calling for an end to maintaining structures within society and culture that limit progress simply for their tradition or holy nature (Haraway 1984). In Iceland there was the sense of an irreverence to structures seen in the way that dance and performance and space were renegotiated in Iceland. In the case of Gérald’s workshop, the choir latched on to this idea of irreverence being reverence to pleasure or the opposing force. An example of this being the “fokk patriarchy” shirts.
This brings us to Donna Haraway and the Ecosia Manifesto’s points that pleasure has a societal purpose. For Haraway this means a world where more good is done than harm. This can also mean a world where new ideas and concepts are allowed to thrive. For the Ecosia this pleasure refers to literal organismic experiences, but also a holistic community and the power of and respect for nature. These ideas were obvious in the choir songs, as well as *Dear Human Being*.

A post-gender world to Haraway is a complete destruction of the gender spectrum. She calls for cyborgs, which alludes to both science fiction becoming reality as well as identity being a personal and complex idea that does not need to be defined (Haraway 1984). The RDF and the participant of Gérald’s project embraced the idea of cyborg and interspecies, in their attempt to facilitate dialogue on gender.

Dissolving the “West and its Discourses”, is a call for anti-colonial thought and discussion (Solanas 1967). It is a call to action as well. This concept suggests that there is value in the knowledge of areas outside of the center and calls for an abandonment of the idea that all that is good and civil comes from the West. Solanas would claim that this idea of the West as centric and important is the result of the male insecurity and hold on society. The concept of dissolving the west and its discourses directly relates to Vujanović and second-hand knowledge, and thus this concept was a driving force in the work of the community as well as my understanding of the community of dance in Reykjavik.

Relating directly to the West and its Discourses is Solanas’s complaint about the male-focused money-system. She claims that this system is set up to prevent women and minorities from achieving their goals. In the context of this research the grants and grant applications represent this money system created for product-driven art.
The EcoSex Manifesto by Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle states that, “We embrace the revolutionary tactics of art, music, poetry, humor, and sex” (Stephens and Sprinkle 2011). This statement aligns well with the vision of Everybody’s Spectacular’s November festival—where art was an act of defiance and the pieces centered around the environment, pleasure, and breaking down binaries. This concept cements the concept that dance can be more than movement and more than a viewing of beauty for audiences. This concept was an underlying theme in the type of work dancers in Iceland are focused on creating and the way that the Dancer Association and the RDF have chosen to spend their time and resources.

Overall, many critical concepts in feminist thought can be seen to come through in the way that participants discuss the network and the structures that they reside inside and how they navigate through them. Participants identified as feminist and discussed these concepts in various settings. The three manifestos highlight some of these conversations.

3.4 The Global Dance Network | The global dance network is a dynamic network built upon relationships between people through dance schools, residencies, festivals, and migrants. Since the network moves through borders, it is always in a process of becoming, and it is tangible through the events and relationships that take place and through its documentation. This network can describe the flows of individual artists as they navigate, or through company movements, such as the summer international tours of the Icelandic Dance Company or the visits to Iceland from The San Francisco Ballet, which is directed by an Icelander, Helgi Tommasson.
The network has recently been documented in Skinner’s study of jive and Wulff’s *Ballet Across Borders*. These studies look at the similarities and differences of these dance styles in various locations and attempt to outline the history of the spread of the styles. One of the first recognitions of both the importance of various types of dance to culture and the global dance network was Les Archives Internationales de La Danse (AID), founded in Paris by Rolf de Maré in 1931. He was the patron of Ballets Suédois. AID existed until 1952 and was a pioneer in dance scholarship and education. It studied and displayed dance through the lenses of technique, history, and ethnography (Claustrat *et al* 2007, 117). AID had a museum, library, 13 exhibits throughout its time, and various lectures. Its goal was display a wide range of choreographic practices and how this was spread through modernism (Claustrat *et al* 2007, 117).

A few examples of the lectures and exhibits included: Dance in Painting and Sculpture, Dance and Movement – a photography exhibit, Festivals Today and Tomorrow, Japanese Dance Through the ages, Popular Dances of Europe, and Old Dances of France. AID was the forerunner to one of the most important dance archives in the world, Dance Archive Leipzig, collecting thousands of photographs, videos, diagrams, Labanotation, and costumes. These various lectures and exhibits attempted to cover classical dance, traditional and folk dance, social dances, and modern dance. This archive was attempting to display the wide-range of dance throughout the world, and in the 1930s the categories of traditional vs modern were stricter. Yet, as these titles suggest, the AID was interested in the flow of all dance styles as they were shared in various settings around the world, and treated all these dances equally, even with categorical boundaries that we know today to be fluid. Dance continues to change and spread, and documenting the localizations of this
global dance network continues to be important. It is also important to note that the mission of AID was to both collect this world network of dance knowledge as well as to have it open and accessible to the public. Thus, it was thought that the study of the global dance network should strive to be reachable to anyone who wishes to learn about it, not just researchers and dancers.

More recently the global dance network has been described as a complex process that brings theoretical and political ideas into movement, “here choreography becomes an explicit form of knowledge production and distribution, an economy of transversal ideas” (Joy 2014, 15). This process is documented through the movement of artists from city to city and through the choreographic work that is produced in localized settings. Throughout this thesis, I use this idea of a global dance network to explain the processes of change and dance production as they occur in Reykjavík Iceland. In the context of my Reykjavík this global dance network is examined through the Reykjavík Dance Festival and the ways that the community participates in the network. The festival, students, and projects will display the importance relationships within Reykjavík and across borders.
Chapter 4 Methods |

This chapter will explain my research objective, questions, population sample and the methods used to obtain my data. I will then introduce each participant with a brief biography, and explain how I analyzed and thought about my data. Finally, I will discuss my own positionality and the ethics that rooted this study.

4.1 Research Objective | My aim was to understand how the dance community in Iceland forms despite the movement of both knowledge and dancers across borders through the global dance network. In looking at this global community I was interested in understanding how the community creates stability, and localizes ideas of what dance is and can be used for in their own way.

4.2 Research Questions | How does the dance community in Reykjavík take imported dance knowledge from the global dance network and create local meaning? In what ways are ideas of dance challenged and expanded? How does movement of people affect the dance community as it builds stability in Reykjavík?

4.3 Research Design | My work is an exploratory ethnography of a case study focused on the experiences of dancers creating art in Reykjavík Iceland, dancers from Iceland, and those participating in the Reykjavík Dance Festival. My intent with this research was to explore the ways that dance knowledge is imported and localized in Iceland and how the
community developed and supports itself. This chapter will examine my methods, positionality as a researcher, and the ethical considerations of my thesis research.

4.4 Population Sample | The dancers in this study were introduced to me first via the director of RDF, who I had met via Skype a year prior when I was applying to graduate school. She connected me with the organizer of the Dance Atelier. Through this connection, I was introduced to the rest of the dancers via email and met with the dancers who were either home for the summer or who wanted to Skype. I chose this method of “chain referral/respondent driven referral” because of my short time in Iceland (Bernard 2006, 154). In addition, this method of referral was useful because I was not able to be present for the winter months where I could have attended workshops and classes to meet dancers more organically. This organized approach allowed me to meet a wide-range of dancers, and one ex-dancer. Before each interview I gained verbal consent. My only requirement for participants was that they were dancers or artists involved with the Icelandic dance community. Because of this I was able to work with Icelandic artists who work in Iceland, Icelandic artists who work abroad, and foreign artists who work or study in Iceland. In addition, all of those in this research have my email information and, in some cases, we are collaborators supporting each other’s work and research objectives.

4.5 Data Collection | My research took place in Reykjavík, Iceland from late June to early September over the course of ten weeks and for five days in Reykjavík, Iceland in mid-November. I spent this time living in the Miðborg neighborhood where I met with dancers for informal meetings and interviews. I was able to meet with dancers of all three active generations through access within the Dancer Association. Two of the weeks over
the summer I spent participating in two workshops that were part of the Reykjavík Dance Festival. One workshop was called *Express Yourself* with Steinunn Kettilsdóttir and the other was “HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE!” with Gérald Kurdian. In November I returned to volunteer and perform in the *Everybody’s Spectacular Festival*.

4.5a Interviews | During the summer months in Iceland, I conducted nine interviews. Of those interviewed seven live and work in Iceland. One participant is Icelandic and lives and works abroad. One interviewee was a visiting artist. Of all interviewed, six studied full-time abroad and due to the structure of the Icelandic BA, all of the participants spent at least four months studying abroad. These interviews were semi-structured (Bernard 2006, 158). Six of these were in person and the two interviews that were not in person were conducted and recorded over Skype. Seven of the interviews were recorded on a voice recorder while I took jottings (Bernard 2006, 171). The one semi-structured interview that was not recorded I took notes by hand, and the final interview was an informal interview. Each interview was between thirty minutes to two hours. They were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by me. Throughout the interview process I asked set questions but using probing techniques I was able to open the conversation up to a greater depth of story-telling (Bernard 2006, 170).

4.5b Participant Observation | I conducted in-depth participant observation two times. The first time was during the last two weeks of my summer fieldwork. During the mornings Monday through Friday from 10:00-15:00 for two weeks I sat in on Vala’s rehearsal of *Dear Human Being* and ate lunch with the cast. I would also help them clean up the stage after each rehearsal. From 17:00-20:00 I participated in Gérald’s, HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE! feminist workshop. At this workshop we read three
manifestos, discussed, and wrote two feminist anthems—these were performed in November. On the weekends I attended Steinunn Ketilsdóttir’s *Express Yourself* workshop from 10:00-16:00. At this workshop we moved all day to her four different practices: People’s Practice, Pleasure Practice, Production Practice, and Party Practice.

Second, in a last-minute decision, I returned to Reykjavik in mid-November for *Everybody’s Spectacular*. I was in Iceland from Wednesday-Saturday. I worked in the Box Office checking in artists and helping out from 13:00-18:00 each day. On Wednesday I attended the Opening Party, where I met the President of Iceland and then went to rehearsal from 19:00-21:00 and attended two performances: *Olso* and *Vera*, an improvisation performance. On Thursday I had rehearsal from 18:00-20:00 and then we performed as a part of Gérald’s piece and then we went to the “Festival Bar.” Friday after work I performed in Anna Kolfínna Kuran’s dance piece *Mothership* to open the QUEER BALL FOR HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE! and then two hours later we performed our songs a second time. The rest of the time was spent dancing. Saturday morning, I flew home. This short trip of intense field work really helped me solidify what the festival was all about, broaden my definition of “dance” in regards to Reykjavik, and allowed me to connect with the artists on a much deeper level. It was also a great opportunity to see the global dance network at play.

**4.6 Introduction to Participants** | The breadth of positionalities of my participants afforded unique insights into the community in Reykjavik. I gave each participant their choice, and it was almost unanimously decided to keep their names and the names of their projects—as exposure is extremely important to the field. There was a strong sense of “say
her name” regarding women and dance, theatre, and other art, so I respected this activism by using real names and real work unless otherwise instructed. Here I will introduce my main participants briefly, along with a map of where each is from, studies, and works. This map will be valuable in understanding the flows of dance knowledge in and out of Iceland.

Tinna. She became my key informant as she works at the Dance Atelier and was able to introduce me to all of the other dancers. When I arrived for my meeting with her on my first day in Iceland, she’d already reached out to everyone.

Brogan. She is from the United Kingdom, studied at Laban in London and has lived and worked in Iceland for seven years. Her current work is the Brogan Davidson Show—where she performs dance and performance art in the living room of strangers and their guests.

Ölóf. One of the originals. She trained in Holland at the European Dance Development Center (which has since merged with the School for New Dance Theatre in Amsterdam) After her studies, there was no freelance community. She was instrumental in the formation of the RDF, the increase of participation on the Dancer Association, and the formation of the dance BA at the Academy of the Arts.

Asrún. We had a Skype interview while she was on residency in Belgium. She lives and works in Iceland and was trained at the Academy of the Arts. Her exchange was in Berlin. Her work Listening Party was performed three times at Everybody’s Spectacular. This piece is a dance party with thirty teenagers playing their favorite songs.
Rita. A third year BA from the Academy of the Arts. She is from Bergen, Norway. We met for two hours the day before she started her exchange in Argentina. She also trained for year in Copenhagen, thus she offered a great number of viewpoints.

Rósa. Trained at P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels, Belgium. She still lives and works there. She and Asrún have been working on a piece called Second Hand Knowledge. This project looks at how places on the periphery obtain their dance knowledge and history—and gives agency back to these places.

Steinunn. trained in NYC for both her BA and her MA. She works in Iceland as well as through residencies around Norden and Europe. Her current work explores the ways that dancers can move within and break the structures in which they are contained. Her work is described as,

**EXPRESSIONS: the power and politics of expectations in dance** is a project that explores expectations in dance through a research of theory and choreographic practice aiming to generate new knowledge and explore the potentialities of dance outside of its expected manifestation. By questioning choreographic structures, methods, and expectations in dance, the project aims to deconstruct and reconfigure the very concept of expectation itself. Through a series of research residencies material and information will be generated through workshops, lectures, and discussions resulting in performances, presentations and publications. Developing a critical conversation around expectations in dance in relationship to the structure of the art form, the project will bring together the views and voices from different individuals and groups in the Nordic region and internationally, all of which are affiliated with dance as an art form through various avenues. The project is led by Icelandic choreographer Steinunn Ketilsdóttir in collaboration with a body of established international artists, scholars, and arts institutions.

(http://steinunnketilsdottir.com)
**Vala.** Completed her dance training in Norway, then moved to Brussels for a while to work, before coming home and becoming a member of the Iceland Dance Company. She was rehearsing for *Dear Human Being*, her first piece since the birth of her daughter. This work looks at human’s impact on pollution. (hand-recorded interview)

**Hekla.** A non-dance student at the Academy of the Arts who was a part of the FEMINIST CHOIR PROJECT workshop and performance. She had some outsider views as a non-dancer involved in the festival and we spent a lot of time talking as we walked home after workshops and performances together. Her name has been changed and her degree withheld as requested. (informal interview)

**Gérald Kurdian.** A musician and performance artist from Paris and was RDF’s APAP (Advancing Performing Arts Project) artist. His work is centered around sexual revolution. He led a two-week workshop in the summer of 2017 where he shared feminist manifestos and facilitated the writing of feminist choir songs. In November, he performed his solo piece HOT BODIES- STAND UP which is part of his full project HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE! This November performance also featured A FEMINIST CHOIR. He also facilitated the QUEER BALL FOR HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE! at the November festival.

Other participants from pieces I viewed and performed and whose work and ideas will be highlighted in various parts of this thesis:
- The nine A FEMINIST CHOIR PROJECT workshop women
- Anna Kolfinn Kuran and her dance piece *Mothership.*
- The participants of Steinunn’s *Expressions* workshop

In order to clearly understand the timeline of dance in Iceland, I break the participants into three “generations” based on the decade of their schooling experience. I created this term for purposes of being able to explain the great deal of changes and growth has occurred that have shifted the community and how each generation has thus navigated through the community differently and brought new things to it. The dancers do not refer to themselves within these generations, though there is a great deal of respect among the younger dancers for Ólöf’s contributions and the work of what I call Generation II.

**Generation I** dancers are those who trained in the 80s and 90s: Ólöf

**Generation II** dancers are those who trained in the 2000s and 2010s and had the option of a BA in Iceland or abroad: Brogan, Asrún, Rósa, Steinunn, and Vala

**Generation III** dancers are those who are current students: Rita and Hekla

Here is Figure 5, which shows where those dancers and artists involved in my research moved to for training or came from. The map does not represent all of the dancers from or in Iceland, nor does it display when more than one person studied in a place. An example of that would be Brussels in Belgium, where multiple dancers in Iceland have gone to train at Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S.). In this map the blue represents the places where Icelandic dancers have gone to study, the flow of bodies out of Iceland is represented by a dotted line. The red on the map represents where dancers have come from to study or work in Iceland, and the flow of those bodies is
represented by a solid line. The purple is a location where the flow of bodies has been both to and from Iceland.

**Figure 5 Map of Participants in the Global Dance Network (by: Andrew Bair)**

### 4.7 Data Analysis

| I transcribed my interviews, coded each individual interview for themes and then compiled all of the emerging themes together while in Iceland. This was done using an interpretive grounded theory approach. Once all interviews were transcribed I pulled out my main codes using inductive or open coding (Bernard 2006, 430). When I returned from Iceland I took my hand-written field notes and all images and compiled them onto my computer, and coded these as well. With all of the data sorted I chose my topics |
and began to write. As I wrote I pulled exemplar quotes to clearly display these themes learned in the field to my reader (Bernard 2006, 438).

4.8 Positionality as Researcher | As a young, white, female, dancer my access to Icelandic dancers was very open. I was able to fit into their community and understand their terminology and at least a part of their experience as dancers. I was working with primarily women and female issues, so my gender was an advantage to working with this population. Still, because of my positionality I did not get to know a lot about the male population of dancers. Though few, this population is present and active in the dance community. This limitation did result in a female-focused study that became a feminist research study. As an ex-dancer I was also physically able to participate in workshops and pieces of the festival. As mentioned, this network not only refers to individual dancers but also to the movement of companies. I did not have the time to meet with the director of the IDC—which travels abroad each year, nor did I come to know any companies that may bring their tours to Reykjavik. Thus, this thesis is centered on the community as made up of individual dancers and facilitated through the RDF. Certainly adding the layer of company movement would expand this discussion in interesting ways. In addition, my identity as a researcher opened up conversations regarding theories and ideas between many of my participants and myself. These conversations were not only valuable in understanding what a dancer in Iceland thinks and experiences, but also in providing me with new sources for my work, and sharing advice on sources for their work. This opened us up to a more collaborative relationship. As an American, my main disadvantage was that I do not read or speak Icelandic—thus there were moments when I did not know what
was being said and a few documents on the history of dance there that I could not read (though they are summed up in another essay in English). Overall though my age, gender, clothes, and dance background made my time in the field feasible and productive.

4.9 Ethical Considerations and Limits | I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Denver on June 7, 2017. All participants are named in this thesis as they individually requested via verbal consent. Those participants who so desired also read a draft of my results to re-confirm their consent and help clarify some events that occurred after I left Iceland and news stories published in Icelandic. They will receive the final thesis and be informed of any future publications related to this research. In no other way were participants compensated for the study.
Chapter 5 Findings |

In this chapter I will examine how dancers in Iceland work to overcome their geographic isolation, funding difficulties, and climate limitations by creating a strong dance community through: residencies, a dance program at LHI, festivals, and collaborations. Iceland, as shared in the introduction, has a geographic and climatic isolation that most European countries with strong art and dance scenes do not. Thus this chapter looks at the realities of this remoteness and dancers’ movements across borders as flows of dance knowledge, the funding of dance and art in Reykjavík, the climate of Iceland and its unique impact on dance spaces and stories told in this region, as well as the movement into dance and collaboration across art forms as activism.

5.1 Isolation and Movement | The geographic location of Iceland has affected its resources and culture more than any other factor. For example, dancers may be able to get residencies in Europe but may not be able to afford the travel. The concept of isolation of place and obtaining dance knowledge is directly explored through the work of two of my participants Asrún and Rósa. Their project titled, Second Hand Knowledge studies isolation’s effect on knowledge through dance history in areas on the peripheries. Rósa explained how this project came to be in our Skype interview from Brussels. She says,
I came across this essay by Ana Vujanović. I remember reading this text and relating a lot to it. And she’s kind of talking about first of all what is the dichotomy between first and second-hand and does it really exist, and secondly she’s kind of denying the bad rep that second-hand knowledge has. Like maybe it’s not that bad at all—maybe it’s actually good to have second-hand knowledge rather than first-hand knowledge. Like for example, you have maybe more artistic freedom because you’re not answering anyone directly because you’re not so related to the big scene so you can actually have a more artistic freedom towards what is actually happening at the same time. One of the points she mentions, that we kind of forget, is that places on the periphery also have their own first-hand knowledge. And these big countries that are “central,” why is their knowledge more valuable? Who declares authority on history and all of this.

Icelandic artists have had to come up with ways to combat this geographical disconnect from the European centers of dance and the feeling of receiving “second-hand” understandings of dance history. There are a few main ways they’ve come up with: The RDF, the requirements at LHI, and movement abroad through residencies and full-time living. Steinunn explained that it is easy to feel trapped in Iceland. You can feel stuck she says, because “what you see here is so limited. Because we are an island, getting away is not easy, it is difficult to get travel funding and it can be hard to move – through dance and spatially as bodies” (Steinunn). That is one of the reasons the RDF is so vital to the community in Reykjavík. At the time of its genesis, there was no place for dancers returning from studies abroad to create freelance work. The RDF was created as a platform
for Icelandic artists to create and share production costs. It also developed into a way to connect with artists from around the world. In this year’s November festival there were artists from England, the USA, Ireland, France, Israel, and more. Thus, it provides a network of knowledge sharing that did not previously exist. This sharing of resources and making further connections abroad helps combat this feeling of being stuck or not good enough. Ólög states,

Because it’s such a small field and a small artwork in a small nation, so very easily you can make everything just very local and you can get really paranoid and insecure about what you are doing… and more exposure and more dialogues helps against that. Because people realize that maybe their work is completely on level with what they are seeing abroad. Usually—there is a fear from coming from a small place, they think they are not good enough, and most of them they are.

The dance education in Iceland also works to address this head-on. One of the requirements during the third and final year of the BA is that each student goes on an exchange. If the student does not wish to leave Iceland, there is an option for an internship with the IDC. Traditionally most of these exchanges have taken place in Europe. The two generation II dancers that I interviewed exchanged in Brussels and Berlin. However, this year’s class was going all over the world. Rita, who is a generation III dancer currently on exchange in Argentina told me that this was one of the things that drew her to the program, “I think that’s super important. Especially in Iceland and in this field, because it’s just an international field” (Rita). Her classmates were going to Malta, Israel, and Europe.
Another way to combat isolation is residencies. Brogan stated, “You have to show your work abroad to survive, at most you get 8 shows with 200 people here. So we have residencies which then connect us to Europe.” These residencies are sought after for the funding and the ability to showcase their work to people outside of the Icelandic dance community. There are other perks to these residencies, as well as education abroad: “People will bring stuff back and it’s obvious it isn’t from here, but that is how the art and community grows” (Brogan). Steinunn agreed saying,

The more you spread and reach out and the more people you interact with, your knowledge becomes deeper and wider. Like travelling. The more you see, the more rounded idea of the world you get. I think it’s the same with anything you do to keep an open mind in your art form.

Sometimes the dancers remain abroad for further opportunities. Rósa, who studied dance in Iceland for two years of the BA course at LHI, before auditioning and receiving an acceptance to P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels, has remained in Brussels. She said she chose to stay because,

I always wanted to kind of have one foot in each place, so immediately as I graduated, we went to Iceland and we (her and her Icelandic collaborator) always showed one piece each year. We wanted to take some part in the community in Iceland, so the aim was always to have one foot here and one foot there.

In her case, as for many, the smallness of the community in Iceland allowed her to still work in Iceland, but her training in Brussels allowed her to stay where there is more prospect. Brogan seemed to agree stating, “Icelanders are very good at coming home.” For
Rósa, the ability to view more dance and obtain more opportunities made it more lucrative to live in Brussels, yet she still has a community at home in Reykjavík.

As a result of so much movement across borders, dancers receive a mix of training methods, meaning that Icelandic dance is not defined by one style. Ólöf, a generation I dancer, discussed this affects the work produced and how the RDF has helped the community feel more stable.

I am not sure if there is a very clear Icelandic identity in dance. At first a lot of people were trained abroad and then a lot of the choreographers working for the company were international. So finding like the idea of an “Icelandic voice,” I think it is coming through more and more. Of course now we have some training in Iceland so more of the teachers are Icelandic.

This change in the training, as well as the deepening involvement and success of the Dansverkstæðið and the RDF provides a ‘home’ as Ólöf describes.

One of the important things about having dance training in Iceland is that you have a contact point for the dancers that go abroad. There are more opportunities abroad and they still really want to come home and still show their work here—and I think that’s really great.

This “home” facilitates what Brogan calls a supportive community. “Because we are so small—we all go see other’s stuff” (Brogan). This was evident to me at Everybody’s Spectacular: it was many of the same people at all of the performances and parties, the same people greeting each other with excitement. By the last night, as I walked through the crowd at Iðnó during our performance of Mothership I was struck by a sense of comfort, being able to recognize the majority of the audience from my interviews and the festival
events that week. Some of the artists had come from abroad and hadn’t been in Reykjavík in months, yet the strength of the community was evident at every event. While this strong community is essential to the dance community in Iceland, it has also created some limitations seen by fellow artists in Iceland. Hekla, who is a non-dance art student at the Academy of the Arts, and I were walking home on Laugavegur, Reykjavík’s main street, from a party discussing one of the shows we’d seen earlier that evening. It had been an odd and long show in the Tjarnarbió black box theater—more than one person had been sleeping during it. Hekla said, “dance here is so closed off. Like they do so much and no one knows. They talk about such cool things, but they will never be able to make the impact they could.” She continued, “Like that wasn’t a typical dance show. It was awesome, but it was art for artists. If I wanted to take my grandma to that show…well, I wouldn’t” (November fieldnotes). LHI has five buildings, so despite the fact that Hekla also attends, she does not have courses nor does she even see the dance students. She felt that within the city of Reykjavík, dance was isolated from other art. Her sentiments highlight something critical about the Icelandic dance community: for years they had to convince the city that they were separate from theatre. They fought for 20 years for spaces and for a dance program at LHI. Thus, they focused on the dance community. Asrún has been working with non-dancers, mostly kids for a few years now. When I asked her why, her response aligned with Hekla’s critique: “It can get boring making art for artists” (Asrún). With more stability in the scene we see this beginning to shift, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

5.2 Funding | This walk home with Hekla led to a conversation about the more commercial and competitive dance, such as the TV show So You Think You Can Dance,
that I am more used to as a United States dancer. This type of dance programming has a wide reach in the general public. In the United States, large commercial dance programs have more money, which means more advertisement and more production, but it also results in more restriction of what can be “said.” Obligations to the funders affects artists all over the world. An ex-dancer and an Icelandic anthropologist had met me for lunch over the summer and one thing she told me was to “follow the money.” She told me that if I knew where the funding came from, I’d know why the art that was being made was being made. Steinunn struggled with this herself, as she was applying for grants for her 2-year research project. Every online form asked about ticket sales. “We aren’t doing a show” she said. It was difficult to convince the funders that her work—which has no end “product” was valuable. She ended up going through the university and obtained a research fellowship and RDF residency. Thus, residencies and festivals that produce work and fund research provide some freedom.

Money was also an aspect that affected why some artists remain abroad. Rósa, who lives in Brussels—well known as being the best city for dance in the world shared a bit about how dancers get funding.

There’s the Icelandic grant. It’s very hard to receive it because there’s only like three groups of dance who receive it a year and its once a year. But, It’s a good grant because you should apply for at least 4 to 5 months, so they say in the guideline that the theatre association gives out every year, they say that you should always take in the research time. Here in Belgium, it’s a bit different, because there is this – because you can receive, if you’ve been working here, this thing called “Artist statute” and then you can have
like unemployment for artists, and they know that. So, actually you can apply for research grants separately and then you can apply for project grants but sometimes you can get both. So sometimes if you don’t get the research grant, you will take your unemployment money for artists and use that for research and then apply for project grant.

Cultural changes in the past ten years have actually helped Icelandic artists out in many ways. Although everyone agrees there is a long way to go if they want to be as recognized as Berlin or Brussels, many felt that these changes helped them to make roots at home in Iceland. The first rather interesting change came after the crash of 2008. During our kaffi together Ólöf shared that after the financial crash there was, “less focus on money, more appreciation of the arts,” re-alignment to what matters:

The crash in 2008 was in some ways, very good for the arts. Because it, before that, everything was about money, and so it is easy to get lost in that, the thing that is most important in art is the thing you cannot put your finger on…So it is very hard to talk about. But anything you can measure is easy to talk about. So like how much income, tickets you sell, how many people saw the performance, that’s easy. And so sometimes the focus was too much on that because it’s easy to talk about and people forget that’s not really why we do it…So when that was taken away it was like ‘ok, now we can focus on what really matters’ and so there was also maybe understanding of the arts and more appreciation of the arts than was the case. It was kind of liberating. Also on the other hand
artists also need infrastructure you need support, you need somewhere to work and some understanding of what you’re doing

(Ólöf).

Dancers took this opportunity to use their art to instill hope back in the dark spaces of the city. Vala described a project she did shortly after the crash, working with her collaborator, a poet, on a site-specific piece/tour of downtown Reykjavík – filling the empty spaces after businesses has closed.

The city and country have since bounced back from the crash, in large part due to an increase in tourism. In many instances, these changes and the new infrastructure have brought some worry into the city of Reykjavík. The skyrocketing prices, especially in the summer months have affected the RDF directly. Steinunn, who is on the board for Dansverkstæðið and heavily involved with RDF told me,

And the big one (main festival, out of three per year) used to be in September, but because of (sigh) tourism, and lack of venues its really expensive to come in Iceland in August and September and it’s also expensive to get housing and… we are always struggling to get venues. So, they decided to push it back and now it’s happening in November, the big event (emphasis mine).

The city’s building plans also forced Dansverkstæðið to move, leaving them without a space for rehearsals, meetings, or performances for the residency-based RDF in August as well as the main event, Everybody’s Spectacular in November. In 2010, group of choreographers got together to open a new space, Dance Atelier (Dansverkstæðið), for
rehearsals and training for professional dance artists. It was "shitty, but somehow with the space some things really started to happen" Ólög had mused with an air of nostalgia. It was a small space, two practice studios and a small lounge, but it was the first space for freelance dancers to work and come together. It was host to dance student events, performances, practices, residents from around the world, yoga, and my first two interviews, see Figure 6. In late July, Dansverkstæðið, the space which was rented out from the city, was closed as the city moved forward with its "New Hversfigata" and other development plans. The building was knocked down to make room for new buildings, some of which are specifically for tourism, Figure 7.
Thus began the #rísidanshús (arise, dance house), the fight within city hall for a new dance space. The dancers not only demanded a new space, but they demanded governmental support – modeled after other Nordic Dancehouses and the EDN.

On Thursday October 12, 2017, Dansverkstæðið posted an update on Facebook:

We are extremely happy to announce that we have a new space. We will be moving to the Westside of the center to Hjardarhagi 47. It is going to take a few months to get our 3 new studios ready but the process will be open to follow here on Facebook and other social media. We thank all the people that have helped us on the way and specially our supporters in the city council of Reykjavík (Dansverkstæðið).

Despite this victory in securing a new space, albeit one that would need a great deal of renovation, the monetary support from the government was not what Dansverkstæðið had fully hoped for. In addition, the Westside is further removed from the center and performance venues than the old space. On January 10, 2018 another update was posted via their Facebook: “Today it was officially announced that Reykjavík city has increased their support to Dansverkstæðið and with that secured us our new home at Hjarðarhagi. Thank you to all our supporters that helped make this happen!” This announcement came
as a result of “The Allocation of Funding for the Culture and Tourism Council” and the “Designation of the Reykjavík Art Museum 2018” which took place in Iðnó on earlier that day. According to Reykjavik.is, Elsa Yeoman the chairman of the council,

the City of Reykjavík has solved the housing problem of Dansverkstæðið with a lease agreement with Reiti for 15 years at Hjarðargata 45-47 for the necessary working space under affordable terms due to increased housing costs and operating costs (reykjavik.is, translated by a participant from Icelandic).

This is the first time that Dansverkstæðið has been given such an agreement (about six other arts spaces were also given first-time agreements) and this means that they have an affordable lease on a space that will serve their needs. This lease will not change in price for the agreed 15 years—helping Dansverkstæðið to not be hit by changing prices in the housing market.

This support from the city came at a critical time of development within the 101 postcode and prices that are affecting locals and potentially mirrors what Ólöf stated in regards to the commitment to invest in the arts and in cultural experiences for locals. It also gives the potential of hope for more investment in art and dance in ways that would allow the community to create more. Vala summed up, quite simply what all of the dancers seem to feel about the money situation in the arts in Reykjavík, “It could be better. More money, but it is better than where you are from (USA). The independent dance scene here does quite well.”
5.3 Climate and Dance | Isolation and maneuvering of funds are not the only obstacles that the Iceland dance community has to overcome. The climate of Iceland and the spaces in which they create their art have influence over the dance season and the psyche of artists in Iceland.

As I walked to Tjarnarbió I couldn’t help but to wish today’s schedule was open. The sun was beating down and the air was a welcomed 65 degrees. I had left my flat early to enjoy a Braud & Co morning bun on the Reykjavík Roasters stages, soaking up the sun. Tomorrow, a week of 40s and rain was to begin. As I walked through the park, I longed to lay in the grass and read my novel at the park. Instead, I stepped into the black box, see Figure 8, to continue my observations of Dear Human Being. Vala greeted me with a sigh, “Sorry. It’s so nice out for Iceland and into the black box we go.”

*Figure 8: Black box rehearsal (by: Emily Creek)*
Over kaffi a few hours later I asked Vala the question everyone seemed to already know the answer to: why was there no dance in the summer? There was the more obvious answer, which Rita had shared earlier in the summer, “I think it’s basically because that’s when the theaters are working. Like when the theater year is active, we are.” And then there was the Icelandic answer, which Vala shared with me that afternoon:

It’s very hard to get people to come to see dance or to come into the theatre when it’s like daylight constantly –nobody cares about anything in the summertime, somehow. The RDF is always in late August, so that’s quite always the beginning of the season. Yeah so late summer, early autumn somehow, and often people are working over the summer for the festival.

Every nice day that summer, things changed, the city felt different. On a sunny day I was walking to my flat from the Bonús supermarket and my house-owner and son stopped me to ask how I would be enjoying the “best day of the year.” I answered that I was going to Nauthólsvík—the geothermal beach. When I finally made my way there it was as if the entire population of Reykjavík was there. The hot pot was full, the golden sand beach was packed with families and sunbathers, even the swimming section of the ocean was packed. I made my way down to the freezing cold water laughing to myself that I would want to swim on a 60-degree day. The energy was contagious and I found myself there for hours until I finally decided I was cold. As the warm weather stuck around, the divide between tourist and Icelander was more evident: tourists in winter coats, Icelanders in shorts and sandals.
The reverse of this occurred a mere two days after lunch with Vala, on a cold and rainy and grey Saturday. We were on lunch during the *Express Yourself Workshop* which was taking place in a white-walled studio with a skylight on the third floor of a LHI building right downtown across from the post office. I was grateful for the light space and the rain droplets that glittered on the skylight. Steinunn said how she had made sure to get this room for her residency as it was the best studio in the city, as seen in Figure 9. The other dancers nodded and began discussing that this white space meant three things. First a white lent itself to creating more “vulnerable art… It is lighter, you cannot hide and it is less depressing” (field notes). Second black spaces were equated with drama—you have to use lights and even a rehearsal feels like a production. Third and most related, “in the wintertime, you enter into a dark space in the dark, dance in the dark, leave in the dark—in Iceland the white dance space is so important on your well-being” (field notes). I thought back to a piece I had viewed, Saga’s MA performance show *Savage Scenes* and about how she used the natural light, opening and closing the skylight, and how raw and playful and imperfect her exploration had been. She went for it, we saw her mistakes, and it was beautiful.
When I went back to Iceland in November I noticed this change as well. The ‘office’ of the festival was a bright yellow room above the restaurant/theatre of lónó. People would gear up in the office and run from task to task around town—grateful for the jobs that allowed them to stay in the same theatre the entire day. It’s as if the dark and cold of outside brings you indoors, keeps you warm, and to prevent going stir crazy—brings out the creative juices. This acknowledgement of the darkness in particular, is seen throughout Icelandic culture: days when the sky is clear enough for Northern Lights, the city shuts off its lights to watch; Sigúr Rós started the Norður og niður (Days of Darkness) music festival
over the winter solstice—bringing audiences into the beautifully lit Harpa for a week of music and dance, turning the darkest week of the year into a week of light. By mid-November lights were strung all around the city, to an American eye they appeared to be Christmas lights, though there were no Christmas-specific decorations up yet, they were more to bring light to the mornings and afternoons of darkness. Staying indoors and creating art is often tied to this darkness. While I was purchasing a good Icelandic rain jacket at 66 Degrees North and talking to the salesman about my work and he told me that “in the winter when it is really dark and everyone gets depressed, that’s when our best art is made. Our best poets and painters were all severely depressed. Sounds bad, but there is not a lot else to do” (fieldnotes). Through this I learned that the space where dance is created, must provide light: either in the brightness of the space or through the skills of the light manager. This type of reaction to the lightness and darkness of Iceland itself was reflected in everyday life as well. On a hike with my friend Jón (name changed) one night he exclaimed his sadness that the sun was already setting at 22:00. “A few more weeks and it’ll be all dark” he said. I asked if it was truly that extreme. He laughed, “well, we have a few months yet until it’s bad. At least we aren’t in the West Fjords, they don’t see the full sun from October until March.” The discussion of the white studio and my chats with locals outside of the dance community brought up another theme, sticking firmly to authenticity as Icelanders.

5.4 Collaboration, Activism, and place-making |

I can’t say what it is, but there is something about allowing yourself to go deep into something, whatever it is. Course this could be a matter of taste,
but for me, that is the work that is the most genuine—it may be that in Iceland you’re just really true to yourself—there’s something Icelandic to it, there is a Nordic accent in it somehow, so I guess it’s more about the artistic integrity in the end… there’s some…something about not compromising your truth. So its maybe a certain stubbornness (Ólöf).

This uncompromising of truth has created a culture of activism within the dance community. This theme expands beyond dance and even beyond art. The newspaper The Reykjavík Grapevine writes a lot on the realities of women’s rights and the treatment of queer people in Iceland. Two of the summer’s events are the Slut Walk (drugsala) and REK Pride. Artists, dancers and other individuals are using their platform to discuss these topics. With this comes the reading of various texts, collaborations with other artists, placemaking, and using art and dance as a way to bring up topics that people would rather not discuss. *Everybody’s Spectacular*, the November festival took on this idea of created an entire week of action. The theme for this year was “smallest acts of defiance.”

*A Spectacular Opening* had just begun. I walked into Mengi, grateful to have made it up the icy hill and saw a girl from the HOT BODIES workshop over the summer. She ran over and hugged me. She waved a man over—he came to say hello. He is a fashion design student from LHI. The three of us chatted for a bit as more people filed into the small place. Mengi grew loud with the sound of laughter and excited greetings. The girl from the summer had to go pour more wine for guests, so the fashion design student and I continued to talk. I noticed his posture improve and he formally nodded as a man walked past:
“dagen”
“dagen”

I turned to see a man in a suit walk past. Another dancer who had just joined us asked who that was. He looked baffled, “that’s the President!” We both said, “no way!” He was still baffled and responded that he wouldn’t joke about that. The President only lived a few blocks away, after all. The student is from India and so the two of us mused about how if this were one of our homes we would have seen a motorcade and army tanks and he would have body guards. We were cut off from our conversation as the welcoming address began. The director of Everybody’s Spectacular came up, introduced the festival and then pulled out some t-shirts that represented the theme. There were four shirts, see Figure 10:

1. The Truth will set you free but first it will piss you off
2. Not a hobby just an underpaid job
3. We are the antiracist, anticolonial, proqueer, interspecies feminists
4. Fokk patriarchy (and a variation in Icelandic)
Everyone cheered and the shirts were tossed out. My new friend was a lot taller than me and grabbed me a coveted “fokk patriarchy” one. Mr. President got number 1. Later the design student whispered to me begging me to approach the president with him. I agreed and we walked up to him and we chatted with him for a bit. He talked about how glad he was the festival was happening, how amazing this community was, asked how we liked his country, shook our hands, and told us we were always welcome in Iceland.

The image of the President with his shirt became the most used photograph of the festival: The cover of many newspapers, and the festival’s most liked Instagram post, see Figure 11. To the members of this community his presence both validated the festival and reminded Iceland as whole that art, specifically dance, refuses to be quiet.
In an interview with the Reykjavík Grapevine, the director of the festival stated, “We try to pick works that deal with issues and subjects that maybe aren’t discussed that much in our day to day lives” (Grapevine.is, 2017). The works I participated in, HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE and the QUEER BALLROOM FOR HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE!, aligned with this intention of the festival. Gérald was the RDF’s APAP artist from Paris. APAP is a European art network of artists and venues for residencies and funding of projects. As a musician, his invitation to the festival displayed the significance both of international collaboration and of collaboration between various performance arts.

Our work began in the summer when The Reykjavík Dance Festival (RDF) put out a call, “Do you want to be in a feminist choir?” inviting those who identify as women to come to a 2-week workshop with Gérald to write a feminist choir song. The workshop would: introduce us to feminist texts, open us up for discussion, give us basic vocal training, and guidance in how to write music. The result would be a performance of this choir as part his Feminist Science Fiction musical in the November Everybody’s Spectacular.
On the first day of the workshop we were given three manifestos (A Cyborg Manifesto by Donna Haraway, S.C.U.M Manifesto by Valerie Solanas, and the EcoSex Manifesto) and we read each out loud and discussed them. Reading out loud presented a few challenges, though Gérald had studied these texts and knew what they meant, he often turned to me to help explain unclear words or metaphors unfamiliar to the Icelanders. After reading them all, we had free writing time. Some of us wrote questions, experiences, and built off of the themes of the manifestos. Others wrote lists of words that stood out. These words are the ones in the lyrics that may strike you as odd: flux (from Cyborg), my fern (from Ecosex), chromosomic (from Cyborg), cyborg (from Cyborg), phallic blob (from SCUM). Many of these words were chosen because of their poetic nature or the feeling the writer/reader got when she heard or saw them. After discussing our free writes, we sorted all writing into two groups: curses and vows. We broke into the two groups to write the songs, vow group seen in Figure 12. Thus song 1 is a vow and song 2 is a curse.

Figure 12: Writing “vows” (by: Gérald)
Gérald had originally wanted everyone to write in our own native languages. However, the Icelanders felt that it was a lot of extra work to translate the manifestos in their minds, understand them in English, and then write on those translated themes in Icelandic. So we wrote in English. There was one Icelander in the “vow” group who wrote vows/declarations in Icelandic because of a specific word play where “ég heita” means “I vow” and “I am called.” Here are the lyrics to the two songs written in August and performed in November in Reykjavík Iceland.
Vows
My brand of feminism is crisis.
I hate you for rebranding my soul.
I thought feminism was a slogan on a shirt.
Not a nail bomb on a suicide bird.

My hips are diggin’ to the ground
My expanding genitals spread out.

I vow to let go of you if you let go of me
I vow to morph, I vow to be, I vow to be free
I vow to stand for my rights and to own my body
I become the shapeshifter and bring death to duality

Ég heiti medusa
Ég heiti engri þögn
Ég heiti thi að hlæga
Ég heiti thi að brosa ekki
Heiti samog þú

Ég heiti þi að vera sjálfri mér fró
Heiti thi að vera sjálfri mér fró
Úna mér
Úna úna úna mér
Úna mér
Úna úna úna mér
Ég heiti umskimtmum
Ég heiti þi að kynvillast
Verði pikulast
Verði verssar
Verði flotth
Renni fram af fjöllum blóð

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH HAHAAHHH HAI!
Curses

Deflower your systematic masturbation
Get cyborg and liberate my fern

Organize my organic lumps

Go copulate yourself!
You faithful phallic blob
Go flux your fluid mother
Hit me soft

Screw the irony of mutilation
You who craves liberation
Lover of chromosomal passion
Physical plumbing sensation.

Go copulate yourself!
You faithful phallic blob
Go flux your fluid mother
Hit me soft
Since Gérald’s call for female voices and his residency were supported by the RDF and was hosted at LHI, all of the participants were: dancers, performance artists, or other art students. None of us were musicians. In a short interview with Gérald one night through a series of giggles (he was feeling a bit “Sunday-ish”) I asked him if he ever worked with professional musicians in his work. He replied,

The choir is really has almost nothing to do with musical skills other than it approaches the birth of what musicality can be. So this is very raw. I never look for or work with singers. And I would be quite embarrassed to work only with musicians—because they would problematize music. And we are problematizing something else. I think.

In the case of this choir we were problematizing the patriarchy, binaries, and inequality. We were bringing ideas of pleasure to the forefront. We did this through the texts we read but also through our bodies. The second day of the workshop Gérald warmed us up and then suggested we start writing. One of the dancers in the choir asked if we could listen to the demo (electronic music our song would be written to) and dance it out to “get it in our bones.” He agreed and we spent the next five minutes flailing our bodies in bliss. When that was finished we all sat down and wrote, and at discussion time our ideas were overflowing. Gérald’s work is very sensory oriented, thus he allowed us to dictate how we needed to approach his work.

We did not come together again until the Wednesday before our performance in November. I had landed that morning and sprinted across the city to work the box office, before heading to the Spectacular Opening. More girls from the workshop came to Mengi and we all walked back to Iônó for rehearsal at 21:00. I was grateful not to be alone because
the city was icy and pitch black, and I was unfamiliar with a dark Reykjavík. Ínó’s theatre is straight past the bar and through some double doors. When we walked in Gérald was in the center, chairs all around him, working on his keyboard, see Figure 13.

![Figure 13: Gérald rehearsing (by: Emily Creek)](image)

He excitedly greeted us. We gathered around him and did the warmups we’d done this summer. Then they taught me the new Icelandic addition to “Vows,” before we got into singing. Once we’d gone through both songs we started to figure out where we’d stand and how we’d transition in after Gérald’s main show. We stumbled through some awkward transitions, laughing all the while. Finally, we came up with a transition and we left rehearsal feeling ready for performing that next night.

The night of the performance came—we were to come to rehearsal, then go get drinks and enter the show like audience members. After Gérald finished (most) of his show,
we would interrupt and state that while he focused on a pleasure revolution, we had some things to say about feminism. Then we would all come onto the floor and sing our anthems. Iônó was packed, Gérald was both wildly popular and intriguing to the festival goers. I ended up standing behind the chairs by the window. None of us had seen the rest of his show, so it was a complete surprise. Performing was a bit of a blur, but we did it and the audience went wild.

This was just night one. THE QUEER BALLROOM FOR HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE! was the next night—and this event was bigger. The intent of this event was providing space for a celebration of fluidity, queerness, and pleasure. Friday afternoon I found myself moving tables and food around in the box office to make a ‘safe space’ run by a queer group called, Andrými (translation: breathing space). The space would be a retreat for people to come away from the music, read feminist texts, and talk about their questions and experiences, see Figure 14.

![Image of books and papers on a table]

*Figure 14: Breathing Space (by: Owen Fiene for Everybody’s Spectacular)*
The group was rather new and had just obtained a lease in this upper room (where we were having our box office) for the queer community. THE QUEER BALLROOM FOR THE HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE! opened with Anna Kolfínna Kuran’s dance piece, *Mothership*, see Figures 15 and 16. I was a part of this piece. This piece was created while Anna was getting her Masters in dance at Tisch in New York. The first time she did it, a group of women walked through the streets of Manhattan, at a snail’s pace, for three hours. The purpose was to take back the streets as women and combat street harassment culture. She was also combating the definition of dance—by using one simple movement: the pedestrian walk. She next did the same, this time 2-hour, piece at a festival through the streets of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. We were doing a 20-min excerpt in the theatre. We had rehearsed for about five minutes that day and we delayed the start until more people came into the space. Hekla and I talked about how we felt like we were going to fall over during the performance because we were not good at walking so slow. We had to wait an hour to start because not enough of the audience had arrived, in part because it had been advertised as a party—one dancer sighed while sipping her drink in the lounge, “Icelanders are famously late to parties.”
Figure 15: Mothership (by: Owen Fiene for Everybody’s Spectacular)

Figure 16: Mothership (by: Owen Fiene for Everybody’s Spectacular)
We went on with the piece, the doors opened and the people filed in, in silence. We were already in our mothership. People filed along the edges of the room, watching, certainly confused. The film of the NYC edition played behind us. We stared ahead of us, not making contact with anyone. There were many photographers and videographers, staring the flash in the face as we slowly moved through. As we turned the corner on our path, we plowed through the crowd—they could either move or be toppled. They caught on and moved. The bow of our ship, Anna, departed to begin speaking about Mothership. Suddenly I was at the bow. It took all of my concentration to keep pace. Anna invited the crowd to join, we turned to the stage—the ship spreading out to a firm line and we all marched together to where Anna was speaking, she bowed and we dissipated. But Mothership as an opening act had set the tone of the night: inclusion.

The night continued on, around 23:00 we gathered to sing our curses and vows again. The crowd hushed and gathered at the foot of the stage, we were in tighter formation than the previous night. We sang with much greater force, the anthems echoing in Iðnó. The crowd erupted. When we exited the stage—I was stopped by an Icelander who was in tears. They thanked us for creating this space, saying that nothing like it existed for the queer community in Reykjavík. They thanked us for writing the songs, being honest and bare, and for facilitating this space. I was caught off guard as a non-queer, non-Icelander, that I was being thanked for the words we had sung. My reply was a hug and a simple, “Gérald really did create something special here tonight.” Our act was followed by the reigning Icelandic drag queen GóGó Starr, who also addressed what this space meant for the queer community. GóGó Starr got the crowd dancing, then a DJ came out and then we danced the night away.
When speaking to Gérald about this work and why it was important for him to make, he told me,

The world—we are in need of physical tools. We don’t rely enough on our sensations and we don’t rely enough on the intuitions that our bodies have. So, I’m also interested these days—because I’m also working around sexuality and utopias—in some systems that I may not understand consciously can lead and make my life quite stimulated. And quite interesting. So yeah, I’m just trying to open doors to that.

Thus, A QUEER BALLROOM FOR HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE! and all the pieces of it—were created to give people the space to express and explore. This is something that was expressed as needed by the people of Reykjavík—as is evident by the ‘thank you’ I heard after our act. But this also came up during the 2-week writing process over the summer.

Only about an hour into our first night of the workshop, we had finished reading the three manifestos. We were gathered around the table and Gérald was asking us what we thought of them. There were many responses that first evening. One participant stated that, “We are so few, it’s easy to feel we were born with a voice,” referring to the population size of Iceland (August Fieldnotes). Everyone seemed to agree. Gérald then asked specifically about gender equality. Hekla said that woman’s issues in Iceland are “non-measurable.” Though some more overt aspects of gender equality are being addressed globally, day to day life still reveal subversive inequalities; “it’s the silent things” that remain unfixed (Hekla). Another participant nodded stating that when she is struggling with something or making a decision she thinks to herself, “what could I do as a man at
this age.” A third shared her frustration with talking about these things with her male friends stating that it is “hard to speak on these things because men don’t see it.” The discussion then panned out to the concepts in the manifestos. Here the cyborgs (the pronoun the group decided on for the project) talked about how in Iceland there was good understanding of “women and gender equality” and “gay” – but not of transgender or queer in any other way. They found the concepts shared in the manifestos important for Icelanders to hear. As a result, the lyrics of our song were bold, and rather crude. This space had created a sense of freedom. This mirrored the way that the dance community had felt freedom in creating the RDF and having their own dance space.

This project with Gérald was far from the only place where feminist themes were addressed through the RDF. Steinunn, a resident of the festival, was sharing about her piece at her workshop and declared, “that it’s not product driven also makes it a little bit feminist.” Her entire project is about breaking the strict structures of dance and finding truth. Vala’s piece Dear Human Being was also activism. Her piece which relied on heavy breathing, gasping, and blowing up balloons, was a commentary on climate change and human pollution. Her goal was that people would leave thinking about the environment, but in the hopes that it’s “not preachy.” The dance was to her was a way to open up this conversation through movement that would shock and inspire the audience. Rather than writing an op-ed on her concern for her daughter’s future as it relates to climate change, she created a show that was bold, a bit creepy, and fascinating to behold. This dance tied the deep respect for the environment that Icelanders have as common sense, and have had a difficult time expressing to tourists. Her use of dance to discuss this also ties to what another ex-dancer shared with me at a bar one night. She was talking about why she had
stopped creating art and stated, “Dance is low on the hierarchy here. There is a lack of voice. It's all women and gay men so there's also that. But also because of this I hope dance cause change” (November Fieldnotes). Connecting dance to other performance arts and activist groups thus does a few important things. First, it re-establishes its place in the schema of art in Reykjavík. The efforts of the RDF and Dansverkstæðið convinced the city to give them a lease that will provide space and opportunity for the next 15 years. Second, it pools resources and creates physical places for these conversations, be it through words or movement, to occur. And third, this activism gives the community a stronger and further reaching voice in the global dance network.

Through an understanding of their positionality as Icelandic the dance community of Reykjavík, as well as those who keep ties from abroad, has been able to expand their work through the past 20 years. Everybody’s Spectacular with its support from a range of artists from around Europe and its activist vision locates the dance community in a new place on this trajectory and exploration of dance in Iceland. Through the residencies, education, collaboration, and activism the dance community has secured itself a home for the next 15 years—as well as a place in the expanding of the Icelandic understanding of gender and art. As is clear from my interviews the “community is on quite a good path…to somewhere” (Asrún). Where that somewhere is, we will have to wait to see. This is where it is now.
Chapter 6 Discussion |

The sub-field of dance anthropology has much to offer to the study of globalization. Arjun Appadurai’s theory of disjuncture brings about many ideas that can be taken from conceptual to tangible through the lens of dance anthropology. In this section I will discuss how the dance community in Iceland illustrates Appadurai’s concepts in the context of globalization and how the actions of the dance community in Iceland can expand the global cultural economy conversation. I will also point out where my case study of the dance community in Iceland diverges from the concepts within this theory, calling upon Ana Vujanović’s notion of second-hand knowledge. Finally, this chapter will address the possibility for growth within the field of dance anthropology. I examine these larger ideas by looking at disjuncture and isolated geography as it relates to the dance community in Iceland; Appadurai’s flows and the localization that occurs through the dance community in Iceland; and how I hope my study can fit into and expand the sub-field of dance anthropology.

6.1 Disjuncture, life on the peripheries, and dance | “Dance, by nature, is an international field,” as Rita said. If one looks back on the histories of both ballet and modern dance, we find that dancers have been traveling—either on tours or to study—since the formation of professional dance theatres. Isadora Duncan came to Iceland between
1904-07 bringing with her liberating ideas of modern dance. Other genres of dance also have global networks and competitions, such as ballroom dances and Irish step dance. Some cities are famous for their dance schools and scenes, including Brussels, Berlin, and New York City. These places become hubs for people to come and study—bringing what they’ve learned back home. Thus dance has always travelled through people. Dancers in Iceland recognize these historical roots, as dancer and theorist Asa Gunnarsdóttir writes, “It is necessary to know what ideologies you are working from, and from where these ideologies have been imported, if you want to situate yourself within the current local and global contemporary dance context” (Gunnarsdóttir 2012).

Following these flows of people and ideas is the essential piece to Appadurai’s theory of disjuncture in the global culture economy. ‘Disjuncture’ is defined in this context, “out of joint nature of many of the relations between global flows” (Robinson 2011). This disjuncture is observed on a scalar level and the relationships flow via various landscapes. This scalar level refers to places at the “center” creating imagined community that influence the peripheries (Appadurai 1996). This then refers to the places where contemporary dance developed and where dancers from Iceland went to study dance. In the case of those involved in my research and the dance genre being used, this scale begins in the New York City in United States and Brussels, goes to other areas of Europe such as Holland, Berlin, and Paris, moves to the other Nordic centers such as Oslo, and finally reaches Iceland, Figure 5 for reference.

Appadurai suggests that cultural elements of these “central places” in the world can absorb the local places on the edges. In the dance community in Iceland we can see this through the lack of a purely Icelandic style of contemporary dance and the constant
international movement of dancers. Dancers in Iceland have received their dance knowledge ‘second-hand.’ Yet, in my study of the dance community in Iceland, there is a clear push back against being a second-hand location on the periphery of a larger dance network. Vujanović states, “Epistemologically speaking, second-hand knowledge is a mediated, unempirical type of knowledge, gained without direct insight into the subject” (Vujanović 2009, 3). In the context of the Icelandic dance community—dancers were trained either in the centers of Europe or they have received their dance history from books, videos, or as the disciples of a formative teacher (Vujanović 2009). Despite this global disjuncture and power dynamic, communities on the peripheries have great amounts of agency, and the Iceland dance community highlights this. Vujanović pushes back against the inevitability of this power dynamic that Appadurai traces in two ways. First she questions the illegitimacy of second-hand knowledge and she argues that local communities on the peripheries are not simply absorbed by the center, but have their own first-hand knowledge.

In these theoretical frameworks (twentieth-century relativist and constructivist Marxist theory, followed by the Frankfurt school), second-hand knowledge is both important and necessary, because it enlarges, complements, and transforms our experience, enabling us to gain abundant insight into reality as we know it. (Vujanović 2009, 5).

So here we see that the first and second-hand knowledge are always being woven in and out of each other. As ideas are spread and localized they take on new meaning and the second-hand interpretation in the local context is just as valuable as the first-hand account. This interpretation can also inform and cause effect on the first-hand account. While understanding the flow disjuncture is vital to understanding the spread of ideas and how
they are localized, this cannot ever tell the whole story. There must be a balance in the emphasis of various power-levels.

Vujanović is arguing that theorists like Appadurai perhaps place too much emphasis on this power dynamic. In the discussion of her exploration of dance communities on the peripheries, as Rósa stated that, the dancers in Iceland, as well as Vujanović question where the dance history comes from and why it is regarded as more valuable when it comes from a center of dance in Europe (Vujanović 2009). The dance community in Iceland deals with an “unhistorical” community (Gunnarsdóttir 2012). She asks,

“what happens, however, when the past is not known? Is the Icelandic contemporary dance scene burdened with the past? The choreographer Saga Sigurdardóttir describes the scene as being very informal: It’s more like things just happen and ‘roll on’” (Gunnarsdóttir 2012).

This interplay between re-interpretation of first-hand knowledge by the second-hand was evident in both the white studio and in the Icelandic performance of Mothership.

While white dance studios are a common theme across the world, in Iceland this common architecture takes on completely new meaning. To the Icelandic dancer this bright space provides much needed natural light for the dark winter. As a culture impacted greatly by light and space due to the extreme summer and winter months, the Icelanders also found that being able to dance in natural spaces provided a different, perhaps more authentic, exploration than the darker spaces where there is a reliance on lighting. As dancers visit Iceland and experience this appreciation for the white dance studio, visiting dancers may in turn bring home some of these ideas.

*Mothership* is another example of how this second-hand interpretation influences the first-hand. Anna was studying in NYC and was effected greatly by street culture in the
city. She created this piece with the knowledge she had from living in both Reykjavik and NYC. The piece premiered in NYC, in its first format. In NYC there was reaction to the long-durational slow march through the city. Next she took to Rio, a city where women have their own experiences and embodied it in their own way—through the same theoretical format as the original performance and through the same movement pallet. Finally, in Iceland, it was again, taken in by women who had their own localized experience with street cat calling. Some participants had experienced it more than other through depending on travel, living abroad, or their differing communities in Reykjavik. This performance was also different from the first two in that it was performed inside of a theatre in a festival setting. Thus, the point of the piece shifted from the first and the second editions of it. In the Icelandic case it was used to engage with the larger festival theme, kick off an event about identity, and promote a sense of inclusion. Since there was a film of the NYC edition playing in the background, the audience was also able to absorb some of that feeling as well, and interpret what it all meant when put together. In the case of the Iceland performance there was also the added element that the audience was both forced to engage and also able to be more passive than the street performances. This piece in its three forms and specifically its Icelandic edition, highlights what Vujanović says as she talks about second hand knowledge: “Given the fact that second-hand knowledge is not based on personal experience or perception but rather communicated to us, one of its essential aspects is the social situation” (Vujanović 2009, 5).

Likewise, we see this push and pull between local first-hand knowledge as agency and frustration at receiving second-hand knowledge through the A FEMINIST CHOIR PROJECT and the discussion of feminism that took place at the workshop. Many nations
cite the Icelandic and Scandinavian gender and equal rights as inspiration. However, as the conversation at the A FEMINIST CHOIR PROJECT displayed, there are people in Iceland who lack an understanding of the spectrum of identity beyond gay and equality. The girls mentioned that other concepts of queer, including transgender, often do not have a place in casual conversation. They stated that there is a stubbornness to change. Gérald and I both received a formal gender studies education in our universities and communities in Paris and the United States. The Icelandic dancers in the conversation had learned about some of these ideas through reading second-hand or through visiting/living in places like NYC. They were using their art and festival to impact the Icelandic narrative. Within the context of the A FEMINIST CHOIR PROJECT, there was at times frustration expressed at the jargon used in the manifestos, because those were not terms the Icelanders had heard in their own contexts before. So I witnessed this struggle of gaining the knowledge (via second-hand) and trying to localize it (via the festival) in order to contribute to the conversation. Through the festival’s A QUEER BALLROOM FOR HOT BODIES OF THE FUTURE!, seen in Figure 17, I also witnessed the community reaction to a localized expression of these ideas. Thus, the isolation of Iceland can be redefined as a force that propels the community to share its experiences and place itself in the global conversation of dance and art.
6.2 Flows of knowledge and localization | Appadurai’s theory has five landscapes which highlight the movement of ideas from the imagined communities of the center to the peripheries. The five landscapes Appadurai defines are Ethnoscapes, Mediascapes, Technoscape, Finanscapes, and Ideoscapes. These landscapes all travel through “globally imagined worlds”—which in the case of the Iceland dance community can be defined as networks of dancers, musicians, producers, costume makers, other artists, and audiences that come together through performances, residencies, education, and jobs. These flows do not easily or smoothly navigated through the global network.

Brogan Davidson created a dance piece in Aurekryi with her father-in-law that highlights the way Iceland shares knowledge through this network. The piece is called Dance for Me and was created in the North of Iceland and highlights her father-in-law’s life. The piece originally was shown to his friends in the town, but eventually they
performed it in big cities like Stockholm as well as tiny towns around Canada. Thus, the perspective and reality of life of an aging man in North Iceland was spread through this dance network. So here we see that Icelandic dance communities not only create their first-hand knowledge, but they show it and share it with other areas of the world. In this, they reject their status as passive in absorbing the flows of knowledge, and show that they are active in spreading their own concepts.

The dance community clearly sends and receives information through these global flows. But they also resist being usurped or dominated by this incoming information by creating their own stable and defined community. This community is stable, yet allows for mobility. Vujanović writes that the “…purpose of resisting the neoliberal market of art and culture and encouraging the principles of sharing and distributing knowledge in alternative ways” (Vujanović 2009, 6). By taking control of the international stage through the RDF, Iceland has become a place where people travel to for the purpose of dance and other art. In this way Iceland asserts itself in this wayfinding process, as artists move to and from the island (Vedel 2014). In addition, the ability to create this platform has solidified a foundation for Icelandic (as well as those who call Iceland home) dancers. The education at LHI also helps establish Reykjavík as a place to teach or to learn dance and other art. In the current group of art students that I interacted with there are students from the United States, Brazil, Norway, India, and France. By having a home-base, Icelandic dancers who choose to freelance their work still have physical place to rehearse, train. A home-base also means a physical community to lean into and a way to pool resources for successful productions and research projects.
Another key concept of Appadurai’s theory of disjuncture is the way this scalar dynamic works within localized contexts. He discusses the way that nations vs states engage with dominant ideoscapes. In this context nation refers to the political agenda of the land and the state refers to the people in the land (Appadurai 1996). An example of this disjuncture dynamic is the development occurring in Reykjavík. The building of a New Hverfisgata is a government plan to grow Reykjavik but it affects locals in negative ways as I saw this summer when the dance community lost their home. So there is a disjuncture between what the government believes the benefit of this building will be for their city, and the reality that many locals are feeling pushed out of their 101 zip code.

There is also a navigation of this dynamic that was evident in the Dancer Association’s efforts to secure a permanent space. Not only did they take the opportunity of funds within the government to do so, they also are establishing their new home on a side of Reykjavik that is more locally focused than the 101 neighborhood. In this way the dance community not only has its own firm place, but they provide some stability to the local community.

6.3 Dance Anthropology and Globalization | This study of dance in Iceland highlighted a few things about the need for continued growth within field of dance anthropology. First, it is necessary to study the communities of dance if you hope to understand the work being produced. Second, studying Western dance styles in both central and periphery countries is needed in the field for a well-rounded discussion and better understanding of global flows. Third, contemporary and other performance dance are not
limited to a staged performance, and dance anthropology’s inclusion of these narratives into its canon is essential for the continued insights this subfield has to offer.

When I asked my participants about an Icelandic style of dance, the response was simultaneously about Icelandic characteristics, “a stubbornness somehow,” and a very clear: there is not an Icelandic style.

Well, I don’t know if we can talk about style. There was this Icelandic music festival in the Kennedy Center one or two years ago. And there was a number of Icelandic musical people from the classical field and also from pop field so it was really different work but it was all presented together, and at the end there was this critic writing about it and he said “there is something very Icelandic about it” even though it was all completely different from each other. And I think it’s a little bit the same with dance (Ólóf).

Looking back at dance anthropological studies, much of what I have read in the canon have been around culturally-specific dance and social dancing. Much of this work, such as the studies of Feld and Kaeppler have been incredibly important and influential for the field. Through them and their study of the movement of these rituals anthropologists have learned about parts of culture that can be hard to get to through interviews and observation of daily chores. But, the world of dance is vast, and modern and contemporary and other staged performance dance styles have been localized by people all around the world. It is important to include these narratives in the canon of dance anthropology. The inclusion of these styles and local renditions serve to expand the already present dance anthropology work and understandings. In addition, recognizing the global spread of contemporary
dance, a re-focus from the movement to the community is a helpful perspective shift. Helena Wulff’s research of ballet companies across Europe offered the first in depth look at the *community* of a particular style of staged dance in a particular place. Networks of dance demonstrate how people around the world relate to each other and choose their own approaches to engage with a style of dance. The way a local community engages says something of importance about what is valued, undervalued, or needed in that place. In a genre of dance like contemporary, the movement itself is the ideoscape that is learned, but how the movement is used is the localization. For an anthropological study of Icelandic dance in this global network, a study that focuses on notation and analysis of the movements themselves would be presumptuous. It is thus, useful to look at how the local dance community decides to build itself around an identity of contemporary dance and what they do with that genre. Networks within the field of dance develop and are sustained through residencies and festivals. These festivals and residencies expose the dancer and the audience to both new movement concepts as well as culturally specific ideas. These networks are not blindly moving through landscapes—but are actively participating and sometimes resisting the normative narrative.

The dance I viewed, learned about, and participated in during my time in the field in Iceland was varied. Some pieces were very clearly contemporary dance. Other pieces were collaborations with artists outside of dance. Still other works were not pieces at all—rather research projects. The idea that a dance community only puts on dance shows or performs rituals, is missing the mark. The dance community of Iceland provides opportunity, supports research, educates, invites collaborations, and produces dance works.
It has to do with these bodies: the festival and dance education, and the atelier. Give people an identity and be more empowered and also choreographers have been more successful at working internationally and also getting funding and more performances. I think that support is very good for anyone. It’s also gives the other ones, like maybe the younger ones to see this possibility like ‘oh, I can do that’ you know, so you need to have something to you know, not a role model, but see a possibility, and before like there was so many kids that learned dance, children and teenagers and then they just left it, they stopped. You did the IDC or nothing… go work in a bank (Ólöf).

As Ólöf says, it is the community of dance that creates these movements within the field. It is also this empowerment and identity that facilitates these global conversations that happen through this dance network. In this community, a sense of belonging and place-making occurs: both at the local Iceland scale and at the global scale as dancers are welcomed into the collaborative nature of the global dance network.

Looking at the dance community of Reykjavík Iceland through the lens of global cultural economy and recognizing the agency of periphery places through a new definition of second-hand knowledge, I find that the study of dance can provide a space for a great deal of exploration in the global world. The global cultural economy need not be limited to the business of nation states and ethnic migration—the flows of artists is unique in its networks around the world. Studying the localization of artistic ideas as well as the way artists advocate for themselves as agents rather than passive subjects in a global disjuncture. Anthropological studies of dance communities and the networks they
participate in and create are vital in the subfield of dance anthropology. There is a wide range of dance genres that have spread around the world, and to overlook them would be a disservice as these dance genres, such as contemporary dance, are clearly a part of this global cultural economy. The spread of art, in this case dance, is a wonderful illustration of the forces of globalization. The realm of art is often an area where bold and challenging ideas are first brought to the attention of the wider world. Fringe philosophical ideas have historically become more well-known and discussed thanks to art movements across borders and the spread of styles of art. Through the study of these dance and art networks through case studies of specific places, anthropologists can learn about how other forms of knowledge are shared, how identities are claimed, and how these are impacted by and continue to impact globalization.
Chapter 7 Conclusion |

“It may be that in Iceland you are just very true to yourself” (Ólög).

Throughout this thesis I have shown how the dance community in Iceland has grown and shifted in the last twenty years. With a focus on the community as it is now and the two editions of the Reykjavík Dance Festival that took place in 2017, I have investigated and presented how the Icelandic dance community fits into the global culture economy as well as how it pushes back against it. Iceland’s geographic location has historically given a sense of isolation to the Icelander. Art, as a result of this geographical isolation has been brought to Iceland in a seemingly second-hand nature. This second-hand knowledge directly impacted what dance history Icelandic dancers knew, but it also provided the opportunity to explore the contemporary genre of dance with fewer expectations. Furthermore, Iceland has its own first-hand knowledge visible in the stories that are told through the art produced. This recognition that first-hand knowledge does not only come from the centric cities and the “hubs of culture” was a central part of this study.

Icelandic dancers have had to rely on the ability to move across borders for generations. Every single one of the dancers who participated in this research had either spent their entire training, part of their training, or were from somewhere other than Iceland. Some dancers have decided to remain abroad due to the availability of resources.
As Reykjavík became a more global city and a destination for tourism, the community has been able to develop the city as a place where people come to view, learn, and teach dance.

Obtaining funding remains an obstacle faced by this community, even as a part of the global dance network. In large part the geographic isolation of Iceland contributes to this challenge. Residencies, which help erase the boundaries between places and allow Icelanders to move and share their work, are also hard to get with enough funding to leave the island. Part of the agency of this Icelandic dance scene is the creation of the Reykjavík Dance Festival. This festival not only allows dancers to get funding for smaller projects and to financially and otherwise support each other’s works, but it also brings artists to Iceland. This festival creates a flow of people into Iceland to learn rather than just from Iceland to other cities to learn and view dance and art. Thus, the geographic isolation of Iceland is challenged by the dancers who organize to make their city its own hub of dance. The BA course at LHI also helps to eradicate this isolation, by inviting students from around the world and encouraging Icelandic dancers to teach in the program. With the city’s support of the community and the up-and-coming- new Dansverkstaðid, Iceland is actively standing up against the classic idea that those on the periphery have to be mobile in order to be a part of a wider network. This permanent home will hopefully be able to provide dancers with more stability in their creative endeavors.

Of course, like many things in Iceland, the Icelandic dance community is impacted by Iceland’s harsh northern climate. The scene is really only active in the fall and winter months. This is in part because that is when theatres have their normal seasons, but it is also heightened in Iceland due to the near 24-hours of sunlight in the summer. There are not a lot of people who would be willing to enter into dark theatres to view dance when the
sun is shining. In contrast, the winter months bring a great deal of darkness. In a way, this brings the dancers to the studios where they are able to work and create. But as the dancers in this study stated, there are some studios in Reykjavík that have no natural light and create a very dark environment. This is difficult on a person when you have to walk to and from work in the dark as well as spend your day in the dark. With this comes the issue of having a space that is sustainable for the dancers and that fits their needs well. The new support of the city of Reykjavík has started this process. This sense of place-making is present throughout many aspects of the work of Icelandic dancers.

*Everybody’s Spectacular* in November highlighted the path that the dance community in Iceland is taking. The festival brought together many types of artists and formally—through its media, its t-shirts, its opening party, and its performances—established itself as a community that takes action. The community was already taking action in city council to get the space they need. In this November edition of the festival, they entered into the realm of activism and safe-spaces. The community also boldly created dance projects and art collaborations that expanded the definition of dance and the purpose of creating art. Steinunn had told me, “I think that people want to be doing a bit more complex projects, where it’s not just about rehearsing for 8 weeks, creating a project on a stage.” And this was super clear in *Everybody’s Spectacular*. There was a feeling in the air that this type of festival and that dancers and their collaborators could do something more for their city.

Through this research I came to understand that the active work of a dancer in Reykjavík Iceland was not only going beyond a simple rehearse-and-perform for the sake of beautiful art model, but that each dancer is an active agent in the global culture economy.
Dance and its flow of knowledge from city to city and country to country is not passive. Dance as localized and used in each setting makes it something fresh, and gives agency to the culture in which it now lives. My time in Iceland opened my eyes to how important it is for anthropologists to consider the learning and creation of art when we discuss boundaries and global flows. Ideologies and culturally important stories and issues are addressed in the work of artists. Putting dance into the global culture economy expands the theory, and in the case of Icelandic dance, it sometimes reverses the flows in interesting ways that would not be seen if the focus were only on elements of culture such as language or money.

It is my deepest desire to include artists in the talk of global flows and to include places that are often overlooked. I believe that the field of anthropology has a rich methodological and theoretical approach to learning about the world, and it would be an injustice to ignore places on peripheries, dancers, and other artists. As the field of anthropology grows and changes with technology and dominant ideologies, including the voices of artists can help anthropologists get to some deeper elements of cultures as well as learn how to engage with wider audiences. The global cultural economy should not be a limiting approach to understanding the flows of being and ideas across borders. I hope that this research has been able to point to the ways in which this global cultural economy is flexible and works in two ways rather than one way.

My approach throughout this research has been to highlight the ways in which the dance community of Iceland not only developed and functions, but also how it relates to the global dance network. I also wanted to broaden both the conversations of dance anthropology and globalization studies within anthropology. I found it very important to
do work in a community of artists who care deeply about their history. The dancers in Iceland were overwhelmingly supportive of my research and willing to share their stories with me and check over my results to makes sure that I understood events correctly. In this way, the work that I was able to do in this thesis is something that I feel excited to share with the community and know will be helpful as they build their dance history archive. The documentation and building of dance archives is complex and often hard to accomplish, as the art form is so visceral. Through this writing I hope to provide a snapshot in time that highlights the way that this festival influences a wider network of dancers and artists, and impacts Reykjavík. I hope that anthropologists will continue to take risks and investigate the more fringe areas of society, for that is often where the interesting stories lay.
Works Cited |


